HOW DOES SUPERINTENDENT LONGEVITY CREATE CONDITIONS OR

CONTEXT THAT INFLUENCE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY

by

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Daniel Blaine Sybrant

April 2012

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my wife Deb whose endless support for me over the years has been remarkable. I could not have done this without you.

I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to my father in law William Austin whose lifelong belief that education could improve your life, no matter what your challenges were, was always an inspiration to me.

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ABSTRACT

This multiple-case study addresses superintendent longevity in relation to student achievement as well as local conditions that influence a superintendent's decisions to stay in one school district. The study focuses on two primary questions; how does superintendent longevity provide a context through programs, relationships and culture that supports and enhances student achievement in schools and how do local conditions influence longevity of a superintendent? The purpose of this study is to analyze how superintendents with more than average longevity in one school district have influenced student achievement by providing a context through programs, relationships and culture that supports and enhances student achievement in their school. The other purpose is to determine how local conditions or characteristics of the community influence the longevity of the superintendent.

Local reform efforts have focused on improvement of instruction at the teacher level, (Marzano, Pickering & Pollock 2001), at the building principal level (Marzano Waters & McNulty 2005), and improvement at the superintendent level (Waters and Marzano 2006) (Metcalfe 2008)(Myers 2011). It was also discovered that superintendent longevity has a positive correlation to student achievement. School improvement has also been recommended system wide (Togneri & Anderson, 2003) (Senge 2006) (Fullan 2010). While existing research provides evidence that superintendent longevity influences student achievement, little is known as to how superintendent longevity contributes to student achievement. This case study included three Montana school districts that exhibited positive longitudinal student achievement gains over a 6 year period and whose superintendent had been in the district at least 8 years. Data from interviews of the superintendent, school board, principals and teachers, observations and document review was included in this study. Themes for each district were identified along with cross case themes common to all three districts.

Four findings were determined that answer the research questions. The findings suggest that hiring, professional development and removing distractions so teachers can focus on teaching were the link between superintendent longevity and student achievement. Local conditions that promoted a superintendent's longevity in a district were a supportive school board and supportive community.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In schools across this country, the school superintendent serves as the chief

executive who is responsible for the education of thousands of students. But for all the

responsibility that a superintendent has, there is little job security. Unlike teachers who

gain tenure, superintendents are only protected by a contract that has been approved by

the local board of trustees. Members of the board can change yearly, and due to many

factors within a school district, the tenure of a superintendent can be limited. In fact, the

national average for school superintendent tenure is between 6 and 7 years. One might

wonder what the educational environment is for students and teachers in schools where

there is frequent turnover of their chief executive officer and if in fact it matters to the

educational process if superintendents stay in a district for an extended period of time?

One might also wonder what conditions within a community allow a superintendent to

stay in a district longer than the national average? This study analyzed three Montana

school districts who have superintendents with longer than average longevity in their

district. The study focused on two primary questions; how does superintendent

longevity provide a context through programs, relationships and culture that supports and

enhances student achievement in schools and how do local conditions influence longevity

of a superintendent? In order to understand the foundation of school improvement, it is

important to analyze school reform efforts over the last 50 years. These reforms have

served as blueprints for school superintendents to use to improve instruction in their schools.

The federal role in education in the United States has historically been a shared role between states and the federal government. Of the 1.3 trillion dollars spent on education in this country during the 2010/11 school year, only 10.8% of the funding for education was provided by the federal government (US Department of Education, 2010). Even without the majority of funding provided, the federal government has developed a number of school reform efforts over the last 50 years. In 1965 the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was passed and out of the ESEA came the Title 1 program of federal assistance to disadvantaged children and funding for post-secondary education through financial aid for needy students. In 1980, congress established the Department of Education as a cabinet level entity. The Department of Education now serves approximately 56 million students across the nation (US Department of Education, 2010).

Several improvement initiatives have been developed and implemented since ESEA was originally implemented. In 1966, the Equality of Educational Opportunity Study (EEOS), also known as the "Coleman Study," was commissioned by the United States Department of Health Education and Welfare to assess the availability of equal educational opportunities to children of different race, color, religion, and national origin. The study was commissioned as a result of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and was one of the first uses of a social survey to enable the federal government to establish national policy. The survey results established data that consisted of test scores and responses

from school aged children starting in the first grade. Scores from standardized tests were also gathered as well as data on personnel that worked in school systems. These surveys also included attitudes towards racial issues (Coleman et al, 1966).

A major piece of legislation that targeted handicapped children was passed by the federal government in 1975 with the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Education Act; Public Law 94-142. This act required public schools that accepted federal funds to provide equal access to education and one free meal a day for handicapped children. Schools were required to evaluate handicapped children and create an individual education plan (IEP) for each student. The IEP called for parents to be included in the design and was to closely resemble the educational experience of non-disabled students (Gutherie, 1981).

One of the first substantial reports that created a foundation for school improvement was A Nation at Risk which was published in 1983 (A Nation at Risk, 1983). The mission of the Nation at Risk task force was as follows: to assess the quality of teaching and learning in the nation's public and private schools, colleges and universities; to compare American schools and colleges with those of other advanced nations; to study the relationship between college admission requirements and student achievement in high school; to identify educational programs which result in notable student success in college; to assess the degree to which major social and educational changes in the last quarter century have affected student achievement and to define problems which must be faced and overcome to pursue the course of excellence in

education. As a result of the findings, the Nation at Risk commission included the following statement in their report;

> 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. As it stands, we have allowed this to happen to ourselves. We have even squandered the gains in achievement made in the wake of the Sputnik challenge. Moreover, we have dismantled essential support systems which helped make those gains possible. We have, in effect, been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament. (A Nation at Risk, 1983, p.9)

The Nation at Risk report served as an alert to the nation that significant improvement efforts must be undertaken in order to protect the nation. The Commission advanced the following recommendations; graduation requirements should be strengthened so that all students establish a foundation in five basics areas: English, mathematics, science, social studies, and computer science, schools and colleges should adopt higher and measurable standards for academic performance, the amount of time students spend engaged in learning should be significantly increased and the teaching profession should be strengthened through higher standards for preparation and professional growth. As a result of A Nation at Risk, the term school accountability became common. This concept became a topic of conversation among politicians, school boards, administrators, teachers and parents. In the 1990's, the focus on reform was centered with the standards movement. In 1994, an initiative was established entitled Goals 2000: Educate America Act. The mission of this act was to improve learning and teaching by providing a national framework for education reform. It also provided recommendations and standards to ensure high levels of educational achievement for all students. General goals for this act included goals in the following categories; school

readiness, school competition, student achievement and citizenship, teacher education

and professional development, mathematics and science, adult literacy and lifelong

learning, safe, disciplined, and alcohol and drug free schools and parental participation

(Goals 2000: Educate America Act). Schools were required to achieve the following

standards; all students in America would come to school ready to learn, all high schools

would graduate at least 90 percent of their students, all students would leave grades 4, 8,

and 12th grade competent in English, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and

government, economics, the arts, history, and geography; United States students will be

first in the world in mathematics and science achievement; every school in the United

States will be free of drugs, violence and the unauthorized presence of firearms and

alcohol and schools will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning (Goals

2000: Educate America Act).

Although this initiative created comprehensive goals, many politicians may not

have felt that the goals had any real hold over school districts. And since the federal

government only funds a small percentage of all public school expenditures, an initiative

that held schools accountable was needed. Therefore, close on the heels of Goals 2000

came the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) which was enacted by the United States

Congress in 2001. According to the framers of the law, NCLB would ensure that all

children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education

and would meet the educational needs of low achieving children. It was also designed to

close the achievement gap between high and low performing students, hold all public

schools as well as states accountable for improving academic achievement of all students,

promote school wide reform and ensure access to effective, scientifically based instructional strategies and challenging academic content. The law also afforded parents school choice if in fact a school failed to meet these requirements. The ultimate goal of this law, however, is that by the year 2014, 100% of all public school students will be proficient in English and math. In order to achieve these steps to proficiency, each state was required to establish benchmarks for schools to meet on an annual basis. These benchmarks were called Annual Measurable Objectives (No Child Left Behind Act, 2001). The law required each state to adopt comprehensive assessments which are administered annually to students in 3rd through 10th grade. Each state is allowed flexibility in establishing annual benchmarks as long as all students are proficient in reading and math by 2014.

The latest development in school improvement efforts at the federal level is contained in the blueprint for the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act by the Obama administration. In this blueprint, the Obama administration challenges the nation to embrace education standards that increase the United States competitiveness in the world and provides incentives for states who adopt academic standards that enable students to succeed at the post-secondary level as well as the workplace. In the blueprint, the Obama administration recommends standards for student accountability, a well-rounded education, diverse learning opportunities, early childhood education, and standards for science, technology, engineering and mathematics education (US Department of Education, 2010.)

With the amount of reform efforts that have been required by the federal government over the years, very little focus has been directed towards the leader of the school; the school superintendent. This seems to be a critical link that has been missing through these reform efforts and it has been through research, not federal reforms that local school leader efforts have been analyzed. Through research local reform efforts have focused on improvement of instruction at the teacher level, (Marzano, Pickering & Pollock, 2001), at the building principal level, (Marzano Waters & McNulty 2005), and improvement at the superintendent level (Waters and Marzano, 2006; Metcalfe, 2008; Myers, 2011). School improvement has also been recommended system wide (Togneri & Anderson, 2003; Senge, 2006; Fullan, 2010.

While Waters and Marzano (2006), Metcalfe (2008), and Myers (2011) informed us through quantitative research methodology that superintendent longevity influences student achievement, this study analyzed how superintendent longevity contributes to student achievement and how local conditions in a school district influence longevity.

The Problem

Over the years, school improvement efforts have focused on teacher influences on student achievement, building principal influences on student achievement, superintendent influences on student achievement and school system influences on student achievement. Hammond (2006) provides several recommendations on how to increase student achievement by enhancing teacher skills. According to Hammond (2006), improvement begins with good teacher preparation programs that are coherent

and well connected to practice and theory. It is critical that practice and coursework

occur simultaneously with quality teacher practicums being provided by the university.

The primary factor in student success is the knowledge level of teachers (Hammond

2006).

> In the last ten years there's been a lot of research done about what makes a difference for student achievement, and it's now clear that the single most important determinant of what students learn is what their teachers know. Teacher qualifications, teacher's knowledge and skills make more difference for student learning than any other single factor. (p.1)

There has also been research conducted involving building principals and school

improvement. By identifying 21 responsibilities of school leaders, Marzano, Waters &

McNulty (2005) determined that school leaders can also have an impact on student

achievement. The 21 responsibilities include communication, developing culture, being

flexible, establishing clear goals, inviting input, staying current with the latest theories

and practices, and monitoring and evaluating the progress of employees and students.

Additional responsibilities were in outreach to the community, establishing relationships

and being visible (Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005).

Waters and Marzano (2006) found that superintendents could have significant

influence on student achievement if several factors were in place. In a meta-analysis of

over 2800 school districts, several actions were found that had an influence on student

achievement. Superintendents established non-negotiable goals for achievement and

instruction. There was school board alignment and support of student achievement goals.

Goals were closely monitored and financial resources were allocated to support

achievement and instructional goals. Waters and Marzano found that building level

autonomy has a positive correlation with student achievement. Waters and Marzano use the term "defined autonomy" as superintendents encouraging principals to take ownership in schools success. Also there was a positive correlation found between superintendent longevity and student achievement. Their analysis revealed that this positive influence may take effect in as little as two years if the previously mentioned conditions are firmly in place (Waters and Marzano, 2006).

There has been research completed regarding comprehensive systems of improvement to enhance student achievement. Togneri & Anderson (2003) found that several system wide factors lead to enhanced school improvement in 5 school districts. They found that districts that focused on a system wide approach where curricular areas were focused on and instructional support was provided, made improvement. A common vision was established and adhered to, and decisions about improvement were based on data analysis. In regard to professional development, districts focused on a clearly identified set of strategies to improved instruction. Finally, districts that made improvement committed to school reform over a period of several years (Togneri & Anderson, 2003).

Fullan (2010) proposes 5 areas where schools should concentrate energy on in order to improve school systems; moral purpose/high expectations, individual capacity, collective capacity, intelligent accountability and resolute leadership. Moral purpose focuses on closing the gap for students so they can thrive and contribute to a global society. It is critical to establish standards that will move students forward to compete in today's world. Moral purpose according to Fullan sets the stage to raise the bar, close the

gap and establish high standards and expectations for all students. Fullan describes

resolute leadership as an exhibition of purpose and action where leaders must take an

active and personal interest in moving academic achievement forward. This is

accomplished by building a guiding coalition that enables the leader to move forward to

accomplish goals. Intelligent accountability pertains to building capacity that is

internalized by stakeholders and reinforced externally. Intelligent accountability relies on

teacher incentives as opposed to punishment, makes an investment in building capacity in

people, develops peer responsibility and utilizes transparent data to enhance instructional

techniques and student results. Fullan describes collective capacity building as

developing a system where there is cooperation from "several decision making sources".

This capacity develops knowledge and commitment among teachers which enhances

strong instruction for students and moves the process forward in a short amount of time.

Finally, individual capacity is the least influential in regard to student achievement.

Although some gains can be made by attracting individuals of high quality, only minimal

gains generally occur. Obviously, we need outstanding educators, however without

collective capacity building, the gains that outstanding teachers or administrators can

make will be minimal and may not last for the long term (Fullan, 2010).

Senge et al. (2000) introduces a number of different systems that schools may use

to increase efficiency of the school and ultimately the performance of the students. These

areas include system wide thinking, open systems thinking, human systems, process

systems, feedback related systems and system dynamic simulation. According to Senge

et al. all of these systems can be utilized at different times to improve schools and student

performance. While this research provides evidence that superintendent longevity influences student achievement, limited research exists to reveal how superintendent longevity impacts student achievement. What follows is the purpose of the study of superintendent longevity and the link to student achievement.

The Purpose

The purpose of this study is to analyze how superintendents with more than average longevity in one school district have influenced student achievement by providing a context through programs, relationships and culture that supports and enhances student achievement in their school. The other purpose is to determine how local conditions or characteristics of the community influence the longevity of the superintendent. As previously mentioned, researchers found that several actions by a superintendent contribute to increased student achievement. They also found that superintendent longevity has a positive correlation to student achievement.

Research Questions

There are two research questions for this study;

1. How does superintendent longevity provide a context through programs, relationships and culture that supports and enhances student achievement?
2, How do local conditions influence longevity of a superintendent?

Theory Base

There are two theory bases that will be used as the foundation for this study; systems theory and transformational leadership theory. The rationale for using systems theory is in order to provide a solid foundation for a school district to improve, a superintendent may follow a systematic way to produce student achievement gains. The rationale for using transformational leadership theory is that superintendents who move student achievement forward may transform a school through specific leadership strategies that ultimately achieves the results the superintendent seeks. The findings in this study will be compared to these theory bases to see if in fact the superintendents in the study use either one or both of these theory bases.

Fullan (2010) outlined 5 areas where schools should concentrate energy on in order to improve school systems; moral purpose/high expectations, individual capacity, collective capacity, intelligent accountability and resolute leadership. Moral purpose focuses on closing the gap for students so they can thrive and contribute to a global society. Moral purpose sets the stage to raise the bar, close the gap and establish high standards and expectations for all students. Resolute leadership is described as an exhibition of purpose and action where leaders must take an active and personal interest in moving academic achievement forward. This is accomplished by building a guiding coalition that enables the leader to move forward to accomplish goals. Intelligent accountability pertains to building capacity that is internalized by stakeholders and reinforced externally. Collective capacity building develops a system where there is cooperation from several decision making sources and this capacity develops knowledge

and commitment among teachers which enhances strong instruction for students and moves the process forward in a short amount of time. Individual capacity is accomplished through hiring educators of high quality who work within the system to enhance student gains (Fullan, 2010).

In system wide thinking, change is accomplished by different departments and individuals within the school system working together on a project that is related in nature. In open systems thinking, solutions are found "in terms of its inputs, outputs, throughputs, and boundaries" (Senge et al., 2000, p. 79). Human systems thinking emphasizes people's roles and relationships within the organization. Process systems emphasizes communication alignment and living systems thinking theorizes that order will develop from chaotic situations. Feedback related systems utilizes a variety of techniques that have been developed to understand more fully feedback process that includes simulation, diagrams and conversations about feedback. Senge (2010), describes system dynamic simulation as feedback that is represented by "non linear math equations" (p. 79). Systems thinking can be used to improve school systems depending on specific purposes and circumstances.

Transformational leadership theory suggests that good leadership influences people to achieve common objectives (Yukl, 1998).

> Leadership is a process wherein an individual member of a group or organization influences the interpretation of events, the choice of objectives and strategies, the organization of work activities, the motivation of people to achieve the objectives, the maintenance of cooperative relationships, the development of skills and confidence by members, and the enlistment of support and cooperation from people outside the group or organization. (p. 5)

Based on this interpretation of leadership, superintendents as well as principals must be facilitative, influential and motivational in moving the organizational agenda forward. Within any organizational structure, what type of leadership the superintendent subscribes to may also influence student performance. Burns (1978) was one of the first researchers to develop the term transformational leadership. In transformational leadership, leaders "tap the motives of followers in order to better reach the goals of followers" (p. 18). Burns established two types of leaders; transactional and transformational. In transactional leadership, followers are provided something in return for performance; for example, promotions given to employees who reach sales quotas or teachers who are rewarded in some extrinsic way for achieving a goal established by the school district. Transformational leaders, on the other hand, are those leaders that engage with others in the effort to increase the level of motivation and morality in the follower. As leaders serve others in this manner, personnel tend to move towards their fullest potential (Burns, 1978).

In a study that explored the enactment of transformational leadership by school superintendents, Baldwin (2008) found preparation of superintendents to be generic and fragmented, with superintendents being positive about their preparation for the superintendency. This study found a lack of balance in the superintendent's relationship with districts and a mismatch regarding leadership where superintendents advocate instructional leadership but school boards expect a good manager. So to bridge this gap, transformational leadership behavior is necessary. Tools used in this transformation are prior educational leadership experience, the knowledge of parents and students, school

board influence and prior teaching experience. According to Baldwin, successful superintendents use transformational leadership behaviors such as shared leadership, fostering acceptance, commitment, vision and consensus building (Baldwin, 2008).

Significance

While quantitative research indicates a relationship between superintendent longevity and student achievement, we do not know how school superintendents that have more than average longevity in one school district influence student achievement through programs, relationships and culture and how that process supports and enhances student achievement in schools. We also do not understand what local conditions and characteristics of the community have the biggest influence on the longevity of the superintendent. Conclusions from this study may inform school boards of the importance of superintendent longevity in relation to student achievement which may lengthen superintendent tenure. It may provide new information that can be used in education leadership coursework at the university level as well as provide information as to what conditions within a community lead to a longer tenure of the superintendent.

The role of the superintendent is complex and multifaceted and many times they are not only working to improve student achievement, they are also struggling to keep their job. The average tenure of a school superintendent ranges from 2.75 years for urban superintendents (Council of Great City Schools, 2000), to 6 to 7 years for the average of all superintendents (Natkin, Cooper, Alborano, Padilla, & Ghosh, 2002). The average tenure for participants in a study of one hundred forty one Texas superintendents was five

years with an average male tenure of 4.8 years and an average female tenure at 6.2 years

(Byrd, Drews, & Johnson, 2006). This quantitative study revealed the average tenure

was found to decrease as the level of difficulty working with the board president or board

members increased. Superintendents also cited increased politics as a contributing factor

to instability in the profession. Superintendents new to a district spent more time in

relationship building with the school board and community groups (Byrd, Drews, &

Johnson, 2006).

Method

This study used a qualitative multi case study to answer the following questions;

1. How does superintendent longevity provide a context through programs, relationships and culture that supports and enhances student achievement in schools?

2. How do local conditions influence longevity of a superintendent?

Participants

In order to answer these questions, a sample of superintendents was determined.

This sample was collected from the population of Montana public school superintendents

that are currently employed in school districts that have an elementary and high school

served by one superintendent. To determine the length of service to be used in the

sample, national averages were analyzed. Nationally, the average tenure of a school

superintendent ranges from 2.75 years for urban superintendents (Council of Great City

Schools, 2000), to 6 to 7 years for the average of all superintendents (Natkin, Cooper,

Alborano, Padilla, & Ghosh, 2002). After reviewing this information, the length of

service for this study was established at 8 years. This exceeds the national average by 1 year. School Administrators of Montana provided superintendent longevity data from the 2010/11 school year. As of the 2010/11 school year, 25 schools in the total population of schools employed superintendents for 8 years or longer (Darrell Rud, 2011). This group of 25 schools became the sample for the study.

Data

Using data bases available from School Administrators of Montana, the number of years of superintendent longevity for all superintendents in the state was established. An initial sample was collected that contained all superintendents that have been in their school district at least one year longer than the national average; or 8 years. Public data on student achievement was accessed from the Montana Office of Public Instruction. Longitudinal student performance data from the MontCas statewide assessment instrument was collected and matched to each superintendent who was included in the initial sample. Once this data was analyzed, a new sample was established. This new sample included three school districts with superintendents that have been in the district 8 years or longer and whose students have shown increased performance over a multiyear period.

Procedure

For each school district selected to be in the study, onsite interviews, observations and document reviews were conducted. Interviews were conducted with the superintendent, principals, teachers and school board members. Data from these

interviews was analyzed to determine if there are common themes that are prevalent from

district to district.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The first problem in this study was to determine whether or not Montana school superintendents that have more than average longevity in one school district have influenced student achievement by providing a context through programs, relationships and culture that supports and enhances student achievement in Montana Schools. The second problem centered on what local conditions or characteristics of the community had an influence on the longevity of the superintendent. This study will help to inform us more about instructional leadership from the superintendent level and how theories can be expanded in this area. Conclusions from this study may also inform school boards of the importance of superintendent longevity in relation to student achievement which could lead to extension of superintendent contracts. It may provide new information that can be used in education leadership coursework at the university level as well as provide information as to what conditions within a community lead to a longer tenure of the superintendent.

The goal of this literature review is to find substantive empirical research about the topic of superintendent longevity and student achievement. The parameters of the literature review have been to primarily look at empirical studies completed since the year 2000. Although research prior to 2000 may be relevant, substantial changes in educational reforms have occurred after that time. Perhaps the most significant reform movement since 2000 is the No Child Left Behind act which was enacted in 2001. This

act holds schools more accountable for student achievement than any law to date and has

put superintendents in the role of serving as instructional leaders as opposed to school

managers

This literature review is organized into 8 sections.

1. The Theory Base for this Study.

2. The History of School Improvement in the United States.

3. The Historical Role of the School Superintendent.

4. The Changing Role of the School Superintendent.

5. The School Reform Agenda.

6. The Superintendent's Role In Relation to Instructional Leadership and Student Achievement.

7. Local Conditions that Influence Superintendent Longevity.

8. Superintendent Longevity in Relation to Student Achievement.

Theory Base for Study

The theory base for this study will be systems theory and transformational

leadership theory.

Systems Theory

Fullan (2010) outlined 5 areas where schools should concentrate energy on in

order to implement systemic change in school systems;

1. Moral Purpose/High Expectations,

2. Individual Capacity,

3. Collective Capacity,

4. Intelligent Accountability and

5. Resolute Leadership.

The concept of moral purpose/high expectations focuses on closing the gap for students so they can thrive and contribute to a global society. It sets the stage to raise the bar, close the achievement gap and establish high standards and expectations for all students. Individual capacity is accomplished through hiring educators of high quality who work within the system to enhance student gains. Although the quality, or individual capacity of staff is critical to student achievement, according to Fullan, this aspect alone will not provide a systemic change in the school system. Collective capacity building develops a system where there is cooperation from several decision making sources and this capacity develops knowledge and commitment among teachers. This commitment enhances strong instruction for students and moves the process forward in a short amount of time (Fullan, 2010). Intelligent accountability pertains to building capacity that is internalized by stakeholders and reinforced externally. Once accountability to the process of systems change is internalized, the system can be transformed more quickly due to "buy in" from staff, administration, the school board, students and community. Finally resolute leadership is an exhibition of purpose and action where leaders must take an active and personal interest in moving academic achievement forward. This is accomplished by building a guiding coalition that enables the leader to move forward to accomplish goals. According to Fullan, if all of these practices are found in a school district, then system wide change is possible.

Senge et al. (2000) introduced a number of different systems that schools may use to increase efficiency of the school and ultimately the performance of the students. according to Senge et al. in system wide thinking, change is accomplished by different departments and individuals within the school system working together on a project that is related in nature. The systems that Senge et al. describes are open systems, human systems, process systems, living systems, and feedback related systems.

In open systems thinking, solutions are found "in terms of its inputs, outputs, throughputs, and boundaries" (p. 79). Human systems thinking emphasizes people's roles and relationships within the organization. Process systems emphasize communication alignment and living systems thinking theorizes that patterns of order will develop from chaotic situations. Feedback- related systems utilizes a variety of techniques that have been developed to understand the feedback process. These include simulation, diagrams and conversations about feedback. Finally, Senge et al. describes system dynamic simulation as feedback that is represented by "non linear math equations" (p. 79). All of these forms of systems thinking can be used to improve school systems depending on specific purposes and circumstances.

Togneri & Anderson (2003) found that several system wide factors lead to enhanced school improvement in 5 school districts. They found that districts that focused on a system wide approach where curricular areas were focused on and instructional support was provided made improvement. A common vision was established and adhered to, and decisions about improvement were based on data analysis. They also found that in regard to professional development, districts that focused on a clearly

identified set of strategies improved instruction. Districts that made improvement

committed to school reform over a period of several years (Togneri & Anderson, 2003).

The lesson in these findings is that in order to achieve true systemic change in an

organization, those that deliver the instruction must find value and importance in the

mission of the organization in order for it to move forward.

Transformational Leadership Theory

Yukl (1998), states that good leadership influences people to achieve common

objectives.

> Leadership is a process wherein an individual member of a group or
> organization influences the interpretation of events, the choice of
> objectives and strategies, the organization of work activities, the
> motivation of people to achieve the objectives, the maintenance of
> cooperative relationships, the development of skills and confidence by
> members and the enlistment of support and cooperation from people
> outside the group or organization. (p. 5)

Based on this interpretation of leadership, superintendents as well as principals must be

facilitative, influential and motivational in moving their agenda forward.

Within any organizational structure, what type of leadership the superintendent

subscribes to may also influence student performance. Burns (1978) was one of the first

researchers to develop the term transformational leadership. In transformational

leadership, leaders are those people that "tap the motives of followers in order to better

reach the goals of followers" (p. 18). Burns established two types of leaders;

transactional and transformational. In transactional leadership, followers are provided

something in return for performance. For example, promotions given to employees who

reach sales quotas or teachers who are rewarded in some extrinsic way for achieving a

goal established by the school district are examples of transactional leaders.

Transformational leaders, on the other hand, are those leaders that engage with others in

the effort to increase the level of motivation and morality in the follower. As leaders

serve others in this manner, personnel tend to move towards their fullest potential (Burns,

1978).

The rationale for using systems theory is in order to provide a solid foundation for

a school district to improve, a superintendent may follow a systematic way to produce

student achievement gains. The rationale for using transformational leadership theory is

that superintendents who move student achievement forward may transform a school

through specific leadership strategies that ultimately achieves the results the

superintendent seeks. The findings in this study will be compared to these theory bases

to see if in fact the superintendents in the study use either one or both of these theory

bases.

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The History of School
Improvement in the United States

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Since school improvement largely falls on the shoulders of the school

superintendent, it is important to understand a historical perspective of school

improvement in the United States. Education in the United States has historically been a

shared role between states and the federal government. Of the 1.3 trillion dollars spent

on education in this country during the 2010/11 school year, only 10.8% of the funding

for education was provided by the federal government (US Department of Education,

2010). Even without the majority of funding provided, the federal government has

developed a number of school reform efforts over the last 50 years. In 1965 the

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was passed and out of this legislation

came the Title 1 program of federal assistance to disadvantaged children. This act also

provided funding for post-secondary education through financial aid for needy students.

In 1980, congress established the Department of Education as a cabinet level entity. The

Department of Education now serves approximately 56 million students across the nation

(US Department of Education, 2010).

The Coleman Report

Several improvement initiatives have been developed and implemented since

ESEA was originally implemented. In 1966, the Equality of Educational Opportunity

Study (EEOS), also known as the "Coleman Study," was commissioned by the United

States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare to assess the availability of equal

educational opportunities to children of different race, color, religion, and national origin.

The study was commissioned as a result of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and was one of

the first uses of a social survey to enable the federal government to establish national

policy. The survey results gathered data that consisted of test scores and responses from

school aged children starting in the first grade. Scores from standardized tests were also

gathered as well as data on personnel that worked in school systems. These surveys also

included attitudes towards racial issues (Colemen et al., 1966).

Education of All Handicapped Education Act

A major piece of legislation that targeted handicapped children was passed by the federal government in 1975 with the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Education Act; Public Law 94-142. This act required public schools that accepted federal funds to provide equal access to education and one free meal a day for handicapped children. Schools were required to evaluate handicapped children and create an individual education plan (IEP) for each student. The IEP called for parents to be included in the design and was to closely resemble the educational experience of non-disabled students (Gutherie, 1981).

A Nation at Risk Report

One of the first substantial reports that created a foundation for school improvement was A Nation at Risk (1983). There were several components to the mission of the Nation at Risk effort. These components include the following;

1. To assess the quality of teaching and learning in the nation's public and private schools, colleges and universities.

2. To compare American schools and colleges with those of other advanced nations.

3. To study the relationship between college admission requirements and student achievement in high school.

4. To identify educational programs which result in notable student success in college.

5. To assess the degree to which major social and educational changes in the last quarter century have affected student achievement.

6. To define problems which must be faced and overcome.

7. To pursue the course of excellence in education (A Nation at Risk, 1983).

The Nation at Risk commission included the following statement in their report:

> 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. As it stands, we have allowed this to happen to ourselves. We have even squandered the gains in achievement made in the wake of the Sputnik challenge. Moreover, we have dismantled essential support systems which helped make those gains possible. We have, in effect, been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament. (p.9)

This report served as an alert to the nation that significant improvement efforts must be undertaken in order to protect the nation. The Commission advanced the following recommendations in order for schools to improve. Graduation requirements should be strengthened so that all students establish a foundation in five basics areas: English, mathematics, science, social studies, and computer science. Schools and colleges should adopt higher and measurable standards for academic performance. The amount of time students spend engaged in learning should be significantly increased and the teaching profession should be strengthened through higher standards for preparation and professional growth.

As a result of A Nation at Risk, the term school accountability became common. This concept became a topic of conversation among politicians, school boards, administrators, teachers and parents.

Goals 2000

In response to a Nation at Risk, in 1994, an initiative by the federal government was established entitled Goals 2000: Educate America Act. The mission of this act was to improve teaching and learning by providing a national framework for education reform. It also provided recommendations and standards to ensure high levels of educational achievement for all students. General goals for this act included goals for school readiness, school competition, student achievement and citizenship, teacher education and professional development, mathematics and science, adult literacy and lifelong learning, safe, disciplined, and alcohol and drug free schools and parental participation (Goals 2000: Educate America Act). Schools were given a 6 year window to improve in these areas and by the year 2000, schools were required to achieve the following standards;

1. All students in America would come to school ready to learn.

2. All high schools would graduate at least 90 percent of their students.

3. All students would leave grades 4, 8, and 12th grade competent in English, mathematics. science, foreign languages, civics an government, economics, the arts, history, and geography.

4. United States students will be first in the world in mathematics and science achievement.

5. Every school in the United States will be free of drugs, violence, and the unauthorized presence of firearms and alcohol and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning (Goals 2000: Educate America Act).

Although this initiative created comprehensive goals, many politicians may not

have felt that the goals had any real hold over school districts. And since the federal

government only funds a small percentage of all public school expenditures, an initiative

that held schools accountable was needed. Therefore, close on the heels of Goals 2000

came the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) which was enacted by the United States

Congress in 2001.

No Child Left Behind

According to the framers of the law, NCLB would ensure that all children have a

fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and would meet

the educational needs of low-achieving children (No Child Left Behind Act, 2001). It

was also designed to close the achievement gap between high and low performing

students, hold all public schools as well as states accountable for improving academic

achievement of all students, promote school wide reform and ensure the access to

effective, scientifically based instructional strategies and challenging academic content.

The law also afforded parents school choice if in fact a school failed to meet these

requirements.

The ultimate goal of this law, however, is that by the year 2014, 100% of all

public school students will be proficient in English and math. In order to achieve these

steps to proficiency, each state was required to establish benchmarks for schools to meet

on an annual basis. These benchmarks were called Annual Measurable Objectives

(AMO). The law required each state to adopt comprehensive assessments which are

administered annually to students in 3rd through 10th grade. Each state is allowed

flexibility in establishing annual benchmarks as long as all students are proficient in

reading and math by 2014.

Blueprint for America

      The latest development in school improvement efforts at the federal level is

contained in the blueprint for the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary

Education Act by the Obama administration (US Department of Education, 2010).

      This blueprint challenges the nation to embrace education standards that increase

the United States competitiveness in the world and provides incentives for states who

adopt academic standards that enable students to succeed at the post-secondary level as

well as the workplace. The plan recommends standards for student accountability, a

well-rounded education, diverse learning opportunities, early childhood education, and

standards for science, technology, engineering and mathematics education (US

Department of Education, 2010). As these efforts to improve schools continue, school

superintendents will be responsible for developing a culture for academic progress in

their district.

The Historical Role of the School Superintendent

      The role of the superintendent has been developing for nearly 200 years. As early

as 1837, the school superintendency was established to help standardize the educational

process for a growing numbers of schools in the United States. Although many schools

were established as one room schools, as the division of grades became more common,

so did the role of the superintendent (Byrd, 2001).

Although the roles of the superintendent have changed over the years, in many ways it has remained the same. One of the first duties of a school superintendent was not only to assist with the day to day management in the school district, but also to develop curriculum that could be used by teachers throughout the school district. As this position evolved, school boards began to expect more from the superintendent such as being an expert in school pedagogy. In addition, the superintendent was expected to become involved in the political arena dealing with parents and other members of the community (Byrd, 2001).

According to Callahan, (1966) and Byrd (2001), the superintendency evolved to include the roles of scholarly leader, business manager, educational leader and social scientist. During the scholarly leader era, much of a superintendent's time was spent observing teachers. During the business manager era, superintendents were charged with the efficient operation of the school. As populations moved to urban areas, there were concerns that public schools were not preparing students as they should. This lead to a transformation to the social scientist role, promulgated by Fredrick Taylor's Scientific Management Theory which was transferred from industry to education (Byrd, 2001). During this time, a significant amount of control was shifted from school boards to superintendents. In the mid1960's, according to Cuban (1976) and Byrd (2001), additional definition of the superintendent role developed. This development included the roles of teacher/scholar which was a parallel to instructional leader, the authoritarian manager which was the image of the administrative chief and the negotiator/statesman

which was the image of the politician responsible for solving conflict between diverse groups in the school district.

More recently, in a study of over 2000 school superintendents, Glass (2000) identified several roles that today's superintendents fill which include change agent, instructional leader and maintainer of the status quo. Glass points out that the most consistent historical role that the superintendent has maintained, however, is the role of instructional leader.

The Changing Role of the School Superintendent

As calls for accountability for schools grow louder with the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act, the superintendent must embrace the role of instructional leader today more than ever. As the nation's schools march towards the 2014 deadline for 100% proficiency of students, the cry for better schools grows louder. As has been previously mentioned, there have been a number of reform efforts at the federal level as well as the local level. Local reform efforts have focused on improvement of instruction at the teacher level, (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001), at the building principal level (Marzano Waters, & McNulty, 2005), and at the superintendent level (Waters and Marzano, 2006; Metcalfe, 2008; Myers, 2011. School improvement has also been recommended system wide (Togneri & Anderson, 2003; Senge, 2006; Fullan, 2010).

Significant changes in the way the superintendent operates has moved fairly quickly in recent years. This is primarily due to the increased accountability required as a result of No Child Left Behind (No Child Left Behind Act, 2001).

Today's superintendents are expected to have a working knowledge of each

aspect of their system with the greatest focus and accountability being in the area of

student performance on required tests (Wasilewski, 2007). It is no longer acceptable or

practical for superintendents to leave the instructional leadership to their principals.

superintendents must become actively involved in monitoring instruction and have a full

knowledge of how district initiatives are being met. In response to these dramatic

changes, the traditional role of the superintendent has evolved primarily in response to a

variety of expectations, constraints and a heightened level of responsibility. According to

Reuters (2009), we are now in a climate of accountability that has not been experienced

in the past. In a study that analyzed the changing role of the school superintendent,

Reuters found 3 areas that were critical to a superintendent's success in the current school

climate; the governance operation, communication and public relations, and student

performance/accountability. These areas are now in the forefront due to the changing

landscape of public education. No Child Left Behind has created a national climate of

accountability which ultimately rests at the door of the superintendent (Reuters, 2009).

The superintendent must coordinate all internal operations as well as external

constituencies to achieve school goals and outcomes.

> The expectations are unprecedented in our nation's history. Students who
> graduate from public schools are expected to progress to college and the
> Pre-Kindergarten -16 progressions are causing many people to look to the
> nations school superintendents to provide direction for this purpose.
> (Reuters, 2009, p. 2)

According to Paul Houston, former director of the American Association of

school superintendents, "today's superintendent must be a master of the C's;

communication, collaboration, community building, child advocacy and curricular

solutions (Houston, 2008, p. 11).

In a case study done by Reuters (2009), superintendents cited several areas that

have influenced their changing role. These include the areas of governance, district size,

and shifting of demographics. They expressed the need for a strong vision that

establishes standards for high expectations. This vision drives the overall philosophy of

the district and provides a clear focus for decision making. The public today is

demanding more documentation to prove that a district is providing solid programs for

their students. As a result of changing demographics, districts are faced with a higher

percentage of at risk students who require a focused instructional program. To

accomplish these challenges, superintendents must be engaged in building collective

capacity within their staff so school improvement goals are attained (Reuters, 2009).

"More than ever the superintendent's role as the instructional leader of the district has

become a vastly important job function. The superintendent is responsible for setting the

expectations for the instructional focus of the district" (Reuters, 2009, p.70).

<u>The School Reform Agenda</u>

In recent years, the public cry for improvement in schools has grown louder.

And once again, the responsibility of implementing improvement through school reforms

has fallen on the shoulders of the school superintendent. Even though improvement

efforts in U.S. schools have dominated the public school landscape for over 40 years,

starting with the Coleman Report and more recently the Blueprint for America, this topic

has grown even more intense in recent years. In 1998, the Comprehensive School

Reform Program (CSRP) was endorsed by the federal government as a way to improve

schools. The CSRP encouraged schools to develop comprehensive plans for

implementing scientifically based strategies for school reform (Borman, 2009). The US

Department of Education defines CSRP as programs that are comprehensive and contain

several educational components. These components included teaching and learning

strategies based on scientifically based strategies, the integration of instruction,

assessment, classroom management, professional development and measurable goals for

student achievement including benchmarks for meeting those goals. It also

recommended shared leadership by teachers and administrators to develop a shared

vision for meeting goals. One of the primary targets of CSRP was that schools must meet

one of two targets when developing their reform plan; the program must, through

scientifically based research significantly improve academic achievement or the program

is found to have evidence that it will improve academic achievement (Borman, 2009).

Close on the heels of CSRP, was the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act

(NCLB). NCLB is one of the most significant pieces of legislation passed in the United

States in terms of school reform. According to the framers of the law, NCLB would

ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-

quality education and would meet the educational needs of low-achieving children (No

Child Left Behind Act, 2001). It was also designed to close the achievement gap

between high and low performing students, hold all public schools as well as states

accountable for improving academic achievement of all students, promote school wide

reform and ensure the access to effective, scientifically based instructional strategies and challenging academic content. The law also afforded parents school choice if in fact a school failed to meet these requirements.

The ultimate goal of this law, however, is that by the year 2014, 100% of all public school students will be proficient in English and math. In order to achieve these steps to proficiency, each state was required to establish benchmarks for schools to meet on an annual basis. These benchmarks were called Annual Measurable Objectives. The law required each state to adopt comprehensive assessments which are administered annually to students in 3rd through 10th grade. Each state is allowed flexibility in establishing annual benchmarks as long as all students are proficient in reading and math by 2014.

Several studies have been conducted assessing the impact of NCLB on a variety of factors. In assessing the impact of NCLB on teachers, Smith and Kovacs (2011) found that instruction and professional development opportunities, particularly in non-tested areas, are being reduced and teacher retention and recruitment are being affected. In a study surveying a large elementary school population of teachers, Smith and Kovacs found that NCLB has led to dissatisfaction and stress to teachers. These impacts are not limited to high minority or low income schools, but all schools in this particular district. Even though the findings of this study revealed teachers generally agreed, (54.2%), that testing helps schools improve student achievement, teachers have questions about a broad set of outcomes such as how NCLB mandates effect classrooms on a day to day basis.

Teachers felt that students were over tested and that this practice has led to decreased instructional innovation in their classroom (Smith and Kovacs, 2011).

According to Krieg (2011), NCLB has inadvertently provided incentives to reduce academic achievement for some groups of students. This phenomena occurs when administrators focus resources on students that are nearing proficiency rather than students who have very low test scores. According to Krieg, this process alienates students who in the original vision of the law were targeted not to be left behind.

Hemelt (2011) found that the scope of failure to meet achievement targets under NCLB may in fact affect future performance of students and ultimately schools. At the center of the NCLB law is the premise that accountability will ultimately improve student performance. In a longitudinal study that analyzed schools from 2003 to 2009, Hemelt found that resources, attention and consequences directed at schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress had varied effects on school performance depending on the degree of a school's failure. For the average school, school wide failure in math or reading lead to similar performances of students for the following year compared to a school which achieved adequate yearly progress by a slight amount. Hemelt concludes that school wide failure in both reading and math is unlikely to lead to improved performance in either subject (Hemelt, 2011).

Blueprint for America

The latest development in school improvement efforts at the federal level is in contained in the blueprint for the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act by the Obama administration (US Department of Education, 2010).

In this blueprint, the Obama administration challenges the nation to embrace education standards that increase the United States competitiveness in the world and provides incentives for states who adopt academic standards that enable students to succeed at the post-secondary level as well as the workplace. The plan recommends standards for student accountability, a well-rounded education, diverse learning opportunities, early childhood education, and standards for science, technology, engineering and mathematics education (US Department of Education, 2010).

Although the Blueprint for America has not at this writing been fully implemented, the plan continues to promote a reform agenda. With No Child Left Behind yet to be fully implemented and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act waiting to be reauthorized, the Blueprint for America may provide the bridge between these two laws.

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The Superintendent's Role in Relation to
Instructional Leadership and Student Achievement

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Hart and Ogawa (1987) focused on superintendents and their influence on academic achievement. In a study that analyzed the superintendent's influence on the academic performance of 6th and 12th grade students, it was determined that superintendents had a small influence on reading and math performance and that superintendents exerted a small influence on academic performance (Hart and Ogawa, 1987; Hanks, 2010).

In a meta-analysis of twenty-seven studies conducted by Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL), a correlation of .25 was found between principal

leadership and student achievement. McREL researchers also found that superintendents

who effectively implement five leadership responsibilities have an impact on student

achievement which correlates at .24; only one hundredth of a percent less (Waters &

Marzano, 2006). Due to this relatively small statistical relationship, according to Hanks

(2010)

> These findings suggest untapped potential for superintendents to lead their
> schools to greater academic achievement and provide specific areas of
> leadership which appear to be most effective. As a result of the small
> statistical relationship, questions are raised by superintendent practitioners
> and educational leadership programs across the nation regarding whether
> or not Waters and Marzano's (2006) research substantiated this influence.
> (Hanks, 2010, p. 7)

Over the years, school improvement efforts have focused on teacher influences on

student achievement, building principal influences on student achievement,

superintendent influences on student achievement and school system influences on

student achievement. Hammond (2006) provides several recommendations on how to

increase student achievement by enhancing teacher skills. According to Hammond

(2006), improvement begins with good teacher preparation programs that are coherent

and well connected to practice and theory. It is critical that practice and coursework

occur simultaneously with quality teacher practicums being provided by the university.

However, the primary factor in student success is the knowledge level of teachers

(Hammond, 2006).

> In the last ten years there's been a lot of research done about what makes a
> difference for student achievement, and it's now clear that the single most
> important determinant of what students learn is what their teachers know.
> Teacher qualifications, teacher's knowledge and skills, make more
> difference for student learning than any other single factor. (p.1)

This information is important for superintendents to understand as they develop hiring protocols and standards in their school district.

Marzano, Pickering & Pollock (2001) cited 9 instructional strategies that school leaders and teachers should be aware of which were found to have a significant influence on student achievement. These strategies are as follows;

1. Identification of similarities and differences in lessons, summarization skills,

2. effective note taking, reinforcing effort and providing recognition,

3. homework and practice,

4. non linguistic representations, cooperative learning, setting objectives and providing feedback,

5. generating and testing hypotheses and questions, and

6. cues and advance organizers (p. 146).

Although these strategies may not be in the day to day job description of a school superintendent, in order for superintendents to become instructional leaders and influence student achievement, knowledge of these strategies are helpful.

By identifying 21 responsibilities of school leaders, Marzano, Waters & McNulty (2005) determined that school principals can have an impact on student achievement. The 21 responsibilities include communication, developing culture, being flexible, establishing clear goals, inviting input, staying current with the latest theories and practices, and monitoring and evaluating the progress of employees and students. additional responsibilities were in outreach to the community, establishing relationships and being visible (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005).

Waters and Marzano (2006) also found that superintendents could have significant influence on student achievement if several factors were in place. In a meta-analysis of over 2800 school districts, several actions were found that had a significant influence on student achievement. Superintendents were collaborative and involved a wide variety of stakeholders in goal setting. They established non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction. There was school board alignment and support of student achievement goals. Goals were closely monitored and financial resources were allocated to support achievement and instructional goals. Two additional findings in this study were what Waters and Marzano labeled bonus findings. The first was a finding that building level autonomy has a positive correlation with student achievement. Waters and Marzano use the term *defined autonomy* as superintendents encouraging principals to take ownership in schools success. As was previously mentioned, Waters and Marzano found a positive correlation between superintendent longevity and student achievement. The study revealed that this positive influence may take effect in as little as two years if the previously mentioned conditions are firmly in place (Waters and Marzano, 2006).

In a mixed method study that analyzed the characteristics of successful urban superintendents, 18 California urban school district superintendents were included. Of this group, 2 superintendents that had lead their districts to make Adequate Yearly Progress for all three years of the study were interviewed in depth regarding their leadership practices. Both superintendents recommended 2 first order leadership strategies to move districts forward academically; building strong superintendent school board relationships and assessing the instructional strengths and weaknesses (Gibbings,

2008). According to Gibbings, instructional leadership by school superintendents has emerged as a critical issue in efforts to reform urban public schools. "It is highly likely that the amount of time devoted to the role of educational leadership may now surpass that of political leadership" (Gibbings, 2008, p. 27).

In a study that analyzed leadership to improve student achievement, Taylor (2010) found that 7 consistent leadership practices emerged after analyzing data from 62 schools in 10 different states. The primary leader action theme found in this study was focusing on a culture of learning. The remaining 6 themes supported this primary theme. The supporting themes were decision making for student learning, stimulation of intellectual growth, personal investment in the change, the expectation of collaboration, strategic planning for consistency and to expect and to support data based decision making. Participants in this study were limited to leaders whose student achievement data supported positive results. All leaders chosen where in schools where there was improvement in student achievement.

> The goal setting processes in all cases were data-driven with an expectation of improvement. All schools were expected to align their school improvement plans and change efforts with the district identified goals and curriculum alignment with district funds allocated to support the needed improvement. Monitoring of student achievement and creation of predictive assessments and formulas was typical. Each of the district leaders interviewed expected the principals to support district goals, but gave the principals autonomy in selecting the pathway to achieve the goals with the understanding of accountability for success. (Taylor, 2010, p.14)

In a study with a population of 300 Texas superintendents representing over 34% of the total students in the state, Hanks (2010) studied the strength of relationship between superintendent ratings of their use of practices and emphasis of identified

responsibilities when contrasted with indicators of student achievement as measured by the Texas Education Agency's accountability rating system in Texas school districts. This study challenged the research of Waters and Marzano (2006) to prove or disprove the relationships established in their study which included superintendent use collaborative goal setting, establishment of nonnegotiable goals for achievement and instruction, board alignment to goals, monitoring goals for achievement and instruction, ensuring resources are provided to support the goals for achievement and instruction, defined autonomy and student achievement (Hanks, 2010). A district is only as effective as its weakest school, but a superintendent's intervention can raise awareness and implement techniques to affect major changes in weaker schools within the district. Islands of excellence can be created by particularly strong and effective principals; however, the individual principals are without the ability to materially impact student achievement in other schools within the district. The superintendent's influence reaches all schools directly and through their work with principals who are influenced by the superintendent's academic leadership (Hanks, 2010, p. 115).

As a result of this study, no significant relationship was found in the constructs of student achievement, the establishment of non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction, board of trustee alignment and support of district goals, monitoring of goals for achievement and instruction, use of resources to support achievement and instruction, and the superintendents valuing of defined autonomy. Hanks concedes, however that the findings of this research demonstrate that for quantitative research to effectively investigate the connection between school superintendent's practice of collaborative goal

setting and student achievement, greater detail must be given to the research design and sampling framework" (Hanks, 2010, p. 121).

Revis (2011) studied whether there was a significant relationship between leadership practices in North Carolina superintendents and achievement of students with limited English proficiency and students with disabilities. Superintendent leadership practices were analyzed in relation to the five areas of superintendent leadership that were reported by Waters and Marzano (2006). As with the previous two studies, this study did not find a significant relationship with the performance of students with limited English proficient students or students with disabilities. Two programs that did influence student achievement in this study were Response to Instruction (RTI) and the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP). In relation to the achievement of adequate yearly progress (AYP) , superintendents cited the lack of funding, personnel and materials to meet this population of students and the lack of expectations by teachers for this population of students. Additional challenges in achieving AYP were the lack of ownership that teachers had for students with disabilities and the lack of professional development in these areas (Revis, 2011).

In a case study that analyzed a large urban school superintendent's effort to influence student achievement, Vasquez (2009) found that in order to close the achievement gap within the superintendent's school district, several reform strategies were utilized. Vasquez found that this superintendent developed a clear vision and mission, clear goals and objectives, spent time in the school and community listening to constituents and formulated a clear strategic plan that promoted district goals. The

superintendent also spent time developing positive relationships with school board members (Vasquez, 2009).

From the findings of these recent studies, there is not conclusive recent research to support the claim that superintendents directly influence student achievement. This lack of research base emphasizes the need for additional research efforts.

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Local Conditions that Influence
<u>Superintendent Longevity</u>

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There is much on the plate of school superintendents, and many times they are not only working to improve student achievement, they are also struggling to keep their job. Several studies have analyzed the longevity of school superintendents in one school district. The average tenure of a school superintendent ranges from 2.75 years for urban superintendents (Council of Great City Schools, 2000), to 6 to 7 years for the average of all superintendents (Natkin, Cooper, Alborano, Padilla, & Ghosh, 2002). The average tenure for participants in a study of one hundred forty one Texas superintendents was five years with an average male tenure of 4.8 years and an average female tenure at 6.2 years (Byrd, Drews, & Johnson, 2006). This quantitative study revealed the average tenure was found to decrease as the level of difficulty working with the board president or board members increased. Superintendents also cited increased politics as a contributing factor to instability in the profession. Superintendents new to a district spent more time in relationship building with the school board and community groups. Fiscal resources did not significantly affect tenure (Byrd, Drews, & Johnson, 2006).

Johnson (2005) found that superintendents who were accessible and worked to build a close relationships to the community, respected local traditions and maintained transparency in their governance style tended to stay in the position longer than those that didn't. This study cites the importance of building connections with community members and other district stakeholders such as teachers and parents. Extended tenure for superintendents was partially attributed to the understanding and connection to the community (Johnson, 2005).

In a study that used social capitol theory to analyze superintendent relationships with the school board and community, Peterson and Williams (2007) found that "district superintendents tread a fragile bridge where the sustainability of their leadership is dependent upon their mastery of the interplay among ethics, advocacy, and community relations" (p.2). This qualitative study included 13 participants ranging from school board presidents, district superintendents, executive directors of state boards of education as well as state administrator associations. The researchers found that good public relations were critical to all superintendents. Public relations was how superintendents interacted with their community and maintained relationships with their school board president. The board president played a large role in the superintendent's relationship to the rest of the board and community and "garnered extra capitol as they were elected again to the chair by their fellow board members. As a result of their positions, the board president's perceptions of superintendents carried extra influence and legitimacy" (Peterson and Williams, 2007, p.12). In interviews with board chairs, a common response was that superintendents influenced, educated, was an effective communicator

and "made the school look good" (p.12). Communication was also a critical factor with

superintendents. In one interview with a superintendent the following response was

recorded;

> The better you inform your board, the better you keep them informed, the
> better you listen to them and their concerns, the better you will be. Now,
> you can't be all things to all people, and you can't be all things to the
> board, but if you are listening to them and you understand their concerns
> and they are listening to you, then you are communicating what is taking
> place and I feel you can be successful. You may not always like to hear
> what you are hearing but we are not going to kill the messengers; we are
> going to understand what we are hearing. (Peterson and Williams, 2007,
> p.15)

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Superintendent Longevity in
<u>Relation to Student Achievement</u>

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As has been discussed, Waters and Marzano (2006) found that there was a

positive correlation between superintendent longevity and student achievement.

Indications of the study revealed that this positive influence may take effect in as little as

two years (Waters and Marzano, 2006).

To further research this link, Metcalfe (2008) analyzed the relationship between

superintendent tenure and student achievement. Metcalfe found that with the average

tenure of urban superintendents being 5 years or less, it is critical for the superintendent

to produce positive student achievement. In a quantitative study that examined

superintendents in Indiana for 10 years, ANOVA was used to analyze Indiana Statewide

Testing for Education (ISTEP) scores and the tenure of a superintendent in a district. A

statistically significant difference was established between student achievement and

superintendent tenure. Metcalfe found that there is a relationship between a

superintendent's length of service and the increase or decrease in student achievement.

This study also found that the most common reason for superintendents to leave their job

was career advancement and not for low student achievement on standardized tests

(Metcalfe, 2008).

In a quantitative study completed by Myers (2011), the length of tenure of a

superintendent and academic achievement as defined by the percentage of students who

scored proficient or better on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment was

analyzed. The objectives of the study were to answer a series of questions. Among those

questions, the study analyzed the relationship between the total length of tenure of a

superintendent and student achievement as well as the relationship between an

individual's total number of years of experience serving as a school superintendent and

student academic achievement. Myers used a number of predictor variables in this study

which include the superintendent's total experience as a superintendent, each district's

assessed valuation per student, the percentage of students that qualified for free and

reduced lunch for each district and each district's total student enrollment. There were

295 school districts included in this study. The results show that among four predictive

variables, total student headcount had the strongest effect on the dependent variable,

student achievement, followed by percentage of free and reduced students, total years as

a superintendent, and then the length of tenure of the superintendent. Myers concluded

that the length of a superintendent's tenure was shown to significantly impact the

outcome of the dependent variable at the .05 level. Of the four predictive variables used

in the study, superintendent tenure had the fourth strongest effect on the dependent

variable, student achievement. Myers also concluded that the total number of years of

experience as a superintendent was shown to significantly impact the outcome variable at

the .05 level. Of the four predictive variables used in this study, years of experience as a

superintendent had the third strongest effect on the dependent variable, student

achievement. "Unlike the results for the three other predictive variables used in the

Model Summary 3, data showed that as the length of tenure of a superintendent increased

so did the percentage of students who scored proficient or better on the 2008 Third Grade

Reading Assessment" (Myers, 2011, p. 68). To further analyze superintendent longevity,

in a study about the perceptions of school board members and superintendent tenure,

case study was used to determine factors that influence leadership behaviors from the

perceptions of school board members (Atherton, 2008). This study involved a 20 year

veteran of one school district and posed the question of how and why the superintendent

choose to stay in one district and how he was able to stay so long. According to

Atherton, there is little research that identifies the specific individual leadership behaviors

of long term superintendents. This study found it challenging to separate the person

from the superintendent and find separate factors from the behaviors. Superintendents

need to be able to meet the political and instructional needs of the school board and the

community they represent (Atherton, 2008). Atherton found several factors and

behaviors that caused the superintendent to remain in the district for so long The factors

included the size of the school district, established faculty and other personnel

relationships and the fact that the school community shows appreciation for the

superintendents efforts. Another important factor was that the school board described the

superintendent as a "good fit" and gave regular positive feedback and evaluations.

Atherton found several behaviors of the superintendent to be important to his longevity.

These behaviors included the fact that the superintendent was resilient, he was recognized

as an instructional leader, he modeled what he expected from staff, and he had a positive

relationship with the union (Atherton, 2008). In a 2008 study, challenges faced by public

school superintendents in Texas schools were analyzed (Trevino et al., 2008). In this

study, researchers analyzed challenges faced by 46 school superintendents and found that

these challenges included politics, testing requirements, funding, wealth of school district

and the lack of teacher quality. Superintendents had concerns for their tenure in the

district due to these challenges. According to Trevino et al, if society's expectations to

increase student performance continues, then the current challenges of the

superintendency must be better understood (Trevino et al., 2008).

Jacobs (2010) found that the impact of a superintendent's leadership may vary

depending on the size of the school district and the length of tenure. In analyzing

districts of 5 different sizes in Texas schools, Jacobs found that superintendents that had

been in a school district for three years, the increase in mean student scores on the Texas

Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) was statistically significant and schools in

the study outperformed all other schools in the state. Although this study does not tie

superintendent longevity directly to the these mean increases, schools experienced their

greatest increase in TAKS scores during this 3 year tenure.

The link between superintendent longevity and student achievement is an area where current empirical research is limited. It is the goal of this study to add substantive research on this topic to the literature base.

Summary of Literature Review

In this literature review, the following questions formed a foundation for the review; how does superintendent longevity provide a context through programs, relationships and culture that supports and enhances student achievement in schools and how do local conditions influence longevity of a superintendent?

The theoretical base for this study is systems theory and transformational leadership theory. Researchers providing the foundation for these areas are Senge et al. (2000) in systems theory and Burns (1978) in leadership theory. Senge et al. introduced a number of different systems that schools may use to increase efficiency of the school and ultimately the performance of the students. According to Senge et al., in system wide thinking, change is accomplished by different departments and individuals within the school system working together on a project that is related in nature. The systems that Senge et al. describes are open systems, human systems, process systems, living systems, and feedback related systems.

In leadership theory, Burns (1978) was one of the first researchers to develop the term transformational leadership. In transformational leadership, leaders are those people that "tap the motives of followers in order to better reach the goals of followers" (p. 18). Burns also established two types of leaders; transactional and transformational. In

transactional leadership, followers are provided something in return for performance. These two researchers set the foundation for superintendents to influence student achievement. In order to accomplish outstanding achievement, both system knowledge as well as leadership knowledge are critical to a leader's success.

The federal role in school improvement has historically been a shared role between states and the federal government. Of the 1.3 trillion dollars spent on education in this country during the 2010/11 school year, only 10.8% of the funding for education was provided by the federal government (US Department of Education, 2010). Since the 1960's, several improvement initiatives have been developed beginning with the Coleman Report and most recently the Blueprint for America. Probably the most significant reform effort has been the No Child Left Behind Act which was enacted in 2002. It was designed to close the achievement gap between high and low performing students, hold all public schools as well as states accountable for improving academic achievement of all students, promote school wide reform and ensure access to effective, scientifically based instructional strategies and challenging academic content. The law also affords parents school choice if in fact a school failed to meet these requirements. The ultimate goal of this law, however, is that by the year 2014, 100% of all public school students will be proficient in English and Math. In order to achieve these steps to proficiency, each state was required to establish benchmarks for schools to meet on an annual basis. These benchmarks were called Annual Measurable Objectives. The law required each state to adopt comprehensive assessments which are administered annually

to students in 3rd through 10th grade. Each state is allowed flexibility in establishing annual benchmarks as long as all students are proficient in reading and math by 2014.

The role of the school superintendent has been developing for nearly 200 years. As early as 1837, the school superintendency was established to help standardize the educational process for a growing number of schools in the United States. Although the role of superintendent has ranged from scholarly leader, business manager, educational leader to social scientist, more recently the role has been as a change agent, instructional leader and the maintainer of the status quo (Glass, 2000).

As calls for accountability for schools grow louder with the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act, the superintendent must embrace the role of instructional leader today more than ever. As the nation's schools march towards the 2014 deadline for 100% proficiency of students, the cry for better schools grows louder.

Today's superintendents are expected to have a working knowledge of each aspect of their system with the greatest focus and accountability being in the area of student performance on required tests (Wasilewski, 2007). It is no longer acceptable or practical for superintendents to leave the instructional leadership to their principals. Superintendents must become actively involved in monitoring instruction and have a full knowledge of how district initiatives are being met.

Starting with the Coleman Report and more recently the Blueprint for America, school reform has been on the minds of educators and politicians for many years. In 1998, the Comprehensive School Reform Program (CSRP) was endorsed by the federal government as a way to improve schools. The US Department of Education defines

CSRP as programs that are comprehensive and contain several educational components. These components included teaching and learning strategies based on scientifically based strategies, the integration of instruction, assessment, classroom management and professional development, and measurable goals for student achievement including benchmarks for meeting those goals.

As has already been mentioned, the No Child Left Behind Act has had a significant impact on educational reform since it was implemented in 2002. In assessing the impact of NCLB on teachers, Smith and Kovacs (2011) found that instruction and professional development opportunities particularly in non-tested areas are being reduced and teacher retention and recruitment are being affected. In a study surveying a large elementary school population of teachers, Smith and Kovacs found that NCLB has led to dissatisfaction and stress to teachers. However they also found that a majority of teachers surveyed believed that the testing requirements in NCLB have improved student test scores. Several studies have been completed which analyze the superintendent's role in relation to student achievement. Although there have been studies completed in this area, conclusive evidence that superintendents influence student achievement is elusive. Waters and Marzano (2006) found that superintendents could have significant influence on student achievement if several factors were in place; superintendent practices such as collaboration and involvement from a wide variety of stakeholders in goal setting, the establishment of non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction and school board alignment and support of student achievement goals. Goals were also closely monitored and financial resources were allocated to support achievement and instructional goals.

Finally, superintendent support of building level autonomy had a positive correlation with student achievement.

In a study that challenged Waters and Marzano (2006), Hanks (2010) studied the relationship of superintendent practices of collaborative goal setting, the establishment of non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction, the use of financial resources to support goals board support of goals, superintendent monitoring of achievement and instruction and defined autonomy of principals. Results from this study did not find a significant relationship between the factors mentioned above and student performance.

More work needs to be done in this area to find clear support for this theorized link between a superintendent's actions and student achievement.

The average tenure for of a school superintendent ranges from 2.75 years for urban superintendents to 6 to 7 years for all superintendents (Council of Great City Schools, 2000) (Natkin, Cooper, Alborano, Padilla, & Ghosh, 2002). In looking at the conditions that influence a superintendent to stay in the same school district, superintendents cited increased politics as a contributing factor to instability in the profession. Superintendents new to a district spent more time in relationship building with the school board and community groups. Fiscal resources did not significantly affect tenure (Byrd, Drews, & Johnson, 2006). Johnson (2005) found that superintendents who were accessible and worked to build a close relationships to the community, respected local traditions and maintained transparency in their governance style tended to stay in the position longer than those that didn't. This study cites the importance of building connections with community members and other district

stakeholders such as teachers and parents. Extended tenure for superintendents was

partially attributed to the understanding and connection to the community (Johnson,

2005). However, according to Atherton (2008) , there is little research that identifies the

specific individual leadership behaviors of long term superintendents. Atherton found

that it was challenging to separate the person from the superintendent and find separate

factors from the behaviors. Atherton found several factors and behaviors that caused the

superintendent to remain in the district for so long. The factors included the size of the

school district, established faculty and other personnel relationships and the fact that the

school community shows appreciation for the superintendent's efforts and the school

board described the superintendent as a "good fit" and gave regular positive feedback and

evaluations. Atherton found several behaviors of the superintendent to be important to

his longevity. These behaviors included the fact that the superintendent was resilient, he

was recognized as an instructional leader, he modeled what he expected from staff, and

he had a positive relationship with the union (Atherton, 2008).

Finally, in looking at whether or not a superintendent's longevity had an influence

on student achievement, Waters and Marzano (2006) found a positive correlation

between superintendent longevity and student achievement. Indications of the study

revealed that this positive influence may take effect in as little as two years if the

previously mentioned conditions are firmly in place (Waters and Marzano, 2006). Jacobs

(2010) found that the impact of a superintendent's leadership may vary depending on the

size of the school district and the length of tenure. In analyzing districts of 5 different

sizes of districts in Texas schools, Jacobs found that superintendents that had been in a

school district for three years, the increase in mean student scores on the Texas

Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) was statistically significant and schools in

the study outperformed all other schools in the state. Although this study does not tie

superintendent longevity directly to these mean increases, schools experienced their

greatest increase in TAKS scores during this 3 year tenure. In a quantitative study that

examined superintendents in Indiana for 10 years, Metcalfe (2008) found that there is a

relationship between a superintendent's length of service and the increase or decrease in

student achievement. The average growth in achievement and superintendent years of

experience was found to be statistically significant (Metcalfe, 2008).

As a result of reviewing the literature, empirical data appears to be comprehensive

in the areas of the theory base for the study, the history of school improvement, the

historical and changing role of the superintendent and an analysis of the school reform

agenda. However, the weaknesses of the literature can be found in the areas of the

superintendent's role in relation to instructional leadership and ultimately student

achievement, and superintendent longevity in relation to student achievement. Much has

been made of the Waters and Marzano (2006) finding that there is a link between the

superintendent instructional leadership and student achievement as well as the longevity

of the superintendent. However, Waters and Marzano conclude that these findings were

bonus findings in their meta analysis. Therefore, these two areas could be considered

gaps in the literature and this gap calls for further inquiry in this area.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

<u>Introduction</u>

The purpose of this study was to analyze how superintendents with more than average longevity in one school district have influenced student achievement by providing a context through programs, relationships and culture that supports and enhances student achievement in their school. The other purpose is to determine how local conditions or characteristics of the community influence the longevity of the superintendent. As previously mentioned, researchers found that several actions by a superintendent contribute to increased student achievement. They also found that superintendent longevity has a positive correlation to student achievement. While this research provides evidence that superintendent longevity influences student achievement, limited research exists to reveal how superintendent longevity contributes to student achievement.

There were two research questions for this study;

1. How does superintendent longevity provide a context through programs, relationships and culture that supports and enhances student achievement?

2. How do local conditions influence longevity of a superintendent?

The purpose of this chapter is to create a plan for conducting a study. Rationale is provided for the type of methodology used, the selection of school districts that were included in the study along with the academic criteria that was used to select the districts.

Information about the way data was collected as well as how it was analyzed and
reported is included in this chapter.

Rationale

Research can be applied in almost any subject area to supply much needed
information when our knowledge is incomplete and problems need to be solved. As
researchers, we can answer those unresolved questions by answering relevant questions
(Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). In order to determine the most appropriate research design we
must first determine what type of methodology answers the question most appropriately.
This study will use a qualitative multi case study design.

Qualitative methodology generally utilizes interviews, documentation review and
observations to gain a deeper understanding of research questions that cannot be
answered by statistical analysis alone. According to Leedy & Ormrod (2010), by using
the qualitative process, several forms of data are collected and examined from a variety
of angles to construct a rich and meaningful picture of a complex, multifaceted situation
(p. 135).

In qualitative research, there are at least 5 different approaches to choose from.
Narrative research is primarily used in social and humanities disciplines where
experiences from an individual or group of individuals are expressed through "lived or
told stories of individuals" (Creswell, 2007, p. 54). In phenomenological research, the
researcher reveals the meaning for several participants of lived experiences or a
phenomenon. This type of research focuses on participant commonalities as they
experience a particular event or phenomenon. In grounded theory research, the

researcher moves beyond describing an event to discovery of a new theory base. In

ethnographic research, entire cultural groups are studied over extended periods of time in

order to interpret patterns and values within the group. Finally case study explores one or

more cases in a "bounded system" (Creswell, 2007, p. 73). A bounded system may

include a setting or a context like one school district, or one school leader or teacher.

According to Creswell (2007), the choice of qualitative research allows

researchers to make certain assumptions that "consist of the stance toward the nature of

reality, how the researcher knows what she or he knows, the role of values in the

research, the language of the research and the methods used in the process"(p. 16).

Researchers Entry, Role and Ethics

The primary investigator in this study brings 27 years of experience in public

education which include a teacher, building principal and 19 years as a school

superintendent in Montana schools. Superintendent longevity and student achievement is

important to the researcher due to the fact that school districts are many times in chaos

due to constant change of its leadership. Early in the researcher's career, he was asked to

take the superintendency of a school district where he served as a high school principal.

The school district was in financial trouble and was facing many legal challenges

including the possibility of being closed by the state. After 8 years of serving as

superintendent, the district was financially stable and student achievement was

improving. However, the researcher was non renewed by the school board and went on

to finish his career in another school district. Since the departure of the researcher, the

district has gone through multiple superintendents and student achievement has remained

low. This experience motivated the researcher to examine whether or not superintendent longevity does in fact make a difference in student achievement and if so, what actions do superintendents take to enhance this achievement? Obviously the above experience was painful for the researcher and his family because in his mind, everything that had been asked of him was done, however, it did not ultimately save his job and the district has continued to struggle since his departure.

To maintain ethical integrity in this study, anonymity, confidentiality and consent was maintained. Weis and Fine (2000) encourage researchers to be respectful of the participants in the study by establishing supportive relationships without stereotyping or using labels that the participant would not agree with. Researchers also need to be protective of vulnerable populations, unequal power relationships as well as placing participants in any type of risk (Hatch, 2002; Creswell, 2007).

Prior to this study being launched, a request for permission to conduct the study was submitted to the Montana State University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The study was approved by the Montana State University Institutional Review Board on September 26th, 2011. The approved consent form was given to and signed by each participant in the study prior to interviews being conducted. A copy of the signed consent was provided to each participant.

To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, school district and participant names have been changed. Field notes and audio tapes of interviews are being kept in a secure location and have been labeled with pseudonyms rather than the real names of

participants. Any documents kept as a part of the study have been stored kept in a secure

location.

<center>Design</center>

Method

   The methodology of this study is a multi-case qualitative design. According to

Yin (2009), the same study may contain more than 1 case. In this study, each school that

was studied became the subject of an individual case study, but the study as a whole

covered more than one school. According to Yin (2009), Herriott and Firestone (1983)

described multiple case designs as "having distinct advantages and disadvantages in

comparison to single case designs. The evidence from multiple cases is often considered

more compelling and the overall study is therefore regarded as being more robust"

(p. 53). By using multiple case studies, the researcher had the opportunity to look at each

and across the 3 cases.

   This design fits this study as multiple school districts and superintendents were

included to analyze the subject of school superintendents and in particular, superintendent

longevity. As has been already mentioned, superintendent longevity in one district is

sometimes limited by a variety of factors. Although there is research that informs us that

the length a superintendent is in a school district has influence on student achievement,

this study will help us to understand how this influence occurs.

   This study included 3 case studies. According to Yin (2009), the first step in this

process is to develop theory centered on the two research questions; how does

superintendent longevity provide a context through programs, relationships and culture that supports and enhances student achievement and how do local conditions influence longevity of a superintendent? The second step, is to design data collection protocol and select the cases. The third step is to conduct the study by collecting data, writing each individual case report and drawing cross-case conclusions. The fourth step is to write individual and cross case comparisons and interpret results in relation to theory and literature base. The flow chart for this study is illustrated in Figure 1.
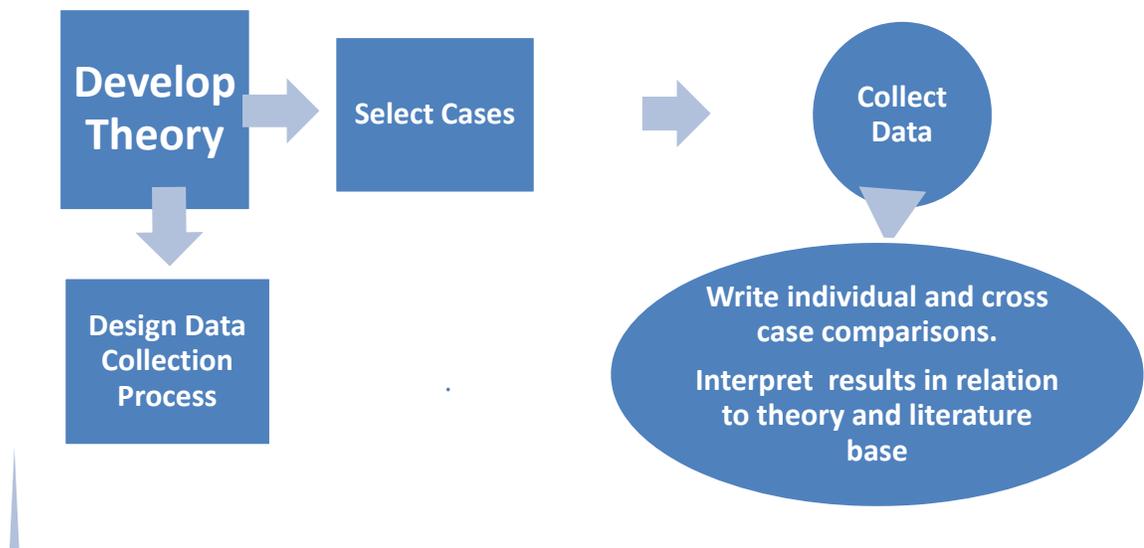
Figure 1. Flow Chart for Study.

To select the cases for this study, data showed that 25 school districts had superintendent that had been in their districts for 8 or more years (Darrell Rud 2011). This group of districts was selected as the sample for this study. In addition, student performance data for the school districts was collected. This section outlines the steps taken to establish the school districts or cases that were included in this study.

Population/Subjects

To establish the sample from which to determine the cases and boundaries for this study, a population of superintendents as well as student achievement data was established.

Superintendent Longevity

Based on national data, the average tenure of a school superintendent ranges from 2.75 years for urban superintendents (Council of Great City Schools, 2000), to 6 to 7 years for the average of all superintendents (Natkin, Cooper, Alborano, Padilla, & Ghosh, 2002). The average tenure for participants in a study of one hundred forty one Texas superintendents was five years with an average male tenure of 4.8 years and an average female tenure at 6.2 years (Byrd, Drews, & Johnson, 2006).

For this study, 8 years in one school district was established as the minimum amount of years a superintendent must have served in order to be in the population for this study. The rationale for this term of years is the fact that this term exceeds the national average and provides evidence of stability in a school district.

Only superintendents that served in a school district that contained at least one elementary school and one high school were included in the population for this study because the criterion reference data that was analyzed began when students were in 6th grade and ended when they were in 10th grade. So in order to obtain this data, it was important that the school district studied contained an elementary school and a high school.

As of the date of this study, there were 25 Montana superintendents that met the criteria being in their school districts for 8 or more years (Darrell Rud, School Administrators of Montana, June 2011).

<u>Student Achievement Data</u>

In order to comply with the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), the Montana Office of Public Instruction implemented the Montana Comprehensive Assessment System (MontCAS) in September of the 2005/06 school year (Montana Office of Public Instruction). Requirements for MontCAS is that each student from 3rd grade through 10th grade take a criterion referenced test (CRT) called Measured Progress. Data from this test was first recorded in the 2005/06 school year and each year thereafter. For this study, students who were in 6th grade in 2005/06 were in 10th grade in 2009/10. Criterion referenced test percentile scores in reading and math were analyzed for students when they were in 6th grade in 2005/06 and again when they were in 10th grade in 2009/10. Although there were 25 schools that had superintendents that had 8 or more years' experience, scores in 5 of the original 25 schools were not published by the Montana Office of Public Instruction. This was due to their small enrollment and class size. Therefore only percentile scores for the remaining 20 schools were used. These scores were recorded for students that were novice, nearing proficient, proficient and advanced.

The rationale for using CRT data was that longitudinal CRT data shows how a cohort of students progressed in academic achievement over a multi-year period. To determine growth on the CRT, the categories of math and reading were utilized. To establish what the proficiency level was for 6th grade in 2005/06, the percentage of

students that were considered proficient plus advanced in both reading and math was recorded. This percentage was again recorded in the 2009/10 school year when this cohort was in 10th grade. Three school districts who had the highest percentage of gain in reading and math combined, gave permission to be in the study, and had no conflict of interest with the researcher were included in the initial sample.

Proficiency Status Math

Table 1 shows the distribution of scores over a multiyear period. In Table 1, the first column signifies the school. Although there were 25 schools in the state that had superintendents that had served in the district for 8 or more years, only 20 of those schools had data available due to the size of the school district. In Montana, in some of the smallest schools with very small individual class enrollment, CRT percentile scores are measured through what is called the Small Schools Accountability System (Montana Office of Public Instruction). This is used in schools where the student population is so small, by publishing results of all students, it may in fact identify one or more students in the grade. Therefore, the data for these schools are not published by the Montana Office of Public Instruction. Due to the fact that 5 of the schools in the original population did not have data available, the sample for the study was reduced to 20 schools.

In Table 1, schools are listed by numbers to protect the identity of the schools. In the first section of Table 1, Math NV represents Math Novice. Math Nr Prof represents Math Nearing Proficient. Math Prof represents Math Proficient. Math Adv represents Math Advanced. PA 6th – 10 represents the proficient column plus the advanced column gain or loss for students from 6th grade until they were in 10 grade. The percent + or –

column represents whether there was a gain or loss in the percentage of students from 2006 to 2010 in that particular category. Student gains in the column have been highlighted by bolding the number.

Table 1. Proficiency Status 2006 to 2010 in Math.

| School | Math NV | | % + - | Math Nr Prof | | % + - | Math Prof | | % + - | Math Adv | | % + - | PA 6th – 10 |
	6th	10th	Diff	6th	10th	Diff	6th	10th	Diff	6th	10th	Diff	Diff
1	50	29	-21	20	40	20	26	21	-5	4	9	5	0
2	13	13	0	25	36	11	45	32	-11	20	19	-1	-12
3	23	13	-10	24	35	11	40	38	-2	13	14	1	**1**
4	32	36	4	39	49	10	22	13	-9	6	1	-5	-14
5	25	16	-9	28	45	17	28	31	3	18	7	-11	-8
6	20	9	-11	18	35	17	38	44	6	24	12	-12	-6
7	5	5	0	21	18	-3	54	50	-4	21	26	5	**1**
8	17	8	-9	26	37	11	43	34	-11	13	20	7	-4
9	24	22	-2	21	32	11	33	20	-13	21	27	6	-7
10	8	3	-5	8	17	9	47	47	0	36	33	-3	-3
11	0	5	5	8	18	10	60	46	-14	32	32	0	-14
12	21	14	-7	17	48	31	38	19	-19	25	19	-6	-25
13	15	7	-8	28	23	-6	46	42	-4	12	28	14	**10**
14	0	0	0	8	29	21	50	36	-14	42	36	-6	-20
15	13	11	-2	39	26	-13	23	48	25	26	15	-11	**14**
16	7	29	22	29	41	-12	43	29	-14	21	18	-3	-17
17	29	14	-15	24	33	9	33	38	5	14	14	0	**5**
18	12	8	-4	12	33	-21	44	50	6	32	8	-24	-18
19	18	6	-12	9	17	8	36	50	14	36	28	-8	**6**
20	6	6	0	28	26	-2	41	50	9	25	18	-7	-2

Proficiency Status Reading

In Table 2, RDG NV represents Reading Novice. RDG Nr Prof represents

Reading Nearing Proficient. RDG Prof represents Reading Proficient. RDG Adv

represents Reading Advanced. PA 6th – 10 represents the proficient column plus the

advanced column gain or loss for students from 6th grade until they were in 10 grade.

The percent + or – column represents whether there was a gain or loss in the percentage

of students from 2006 to 2010 in that particular category.

Growth Status

In Table 3, once again the school is listed as a number on the left side. P + A

Growth Mth, represents the total proficient score + the total advanced score in math from

Table 1. P + A Growth Rdg represent the total proficient score + the total advanced score

in reading from Table 1. P + A Total M + R represent the total proficient and advance

score in both math and reading. The Made AYP column represents whether or not a

school made Adequate Yearly Progress as required by the No Child Left Behind act. The

data in this column represents schools that made AYP every year since it started being

recorded by the Montana Office of Public Instruction in 2003. Of the 20 schools

reviewed, only 4 schools made AYP every year since 2003. Even though AYP is not

analyzed in the context of this study, this data was included for information purposes and

could be used in future studies.

Table 2. Proficiency Status Reading.

School	RDG NV		% + -	RDG Nr Prof		% + -	RDG Prof		% + -	RDG Adv		% + -	PA 6th-10
	6th	10th	Diff	6th	10th	Diff	6th	10th	Diff	6th	10th	Diff	Diff
1	13	21	8	28	20	-8	49	35	-14	11	25	14	0
2	4	11	7	18	12	-6	51	39	-12	26	38	12	0
3	15	7	-6	13	6	-7	51	43	-8	21	44	23	**15**
4	17	37	20	30	21	-9	44	35	-9	9	7	-2	-11
5	22	13	-21	16	16	0	38	37	-1	24	24	10	**9**
6	9	10	1	11	7	-4	38	44	6	43	38	-5	**1**
7	5	3	-2	13	5	-8	33	26	-7	49	66	17	**10**
8	6	3	-3	21	3	-18	51	41	-10	23	53	20	**10**
9	9	7	-2	27	10	-17	36	44	8	27	39	12	**20**
10	6	3	-3	11	11	0	47	44	-3	36	42	6	**3**
11	0	5	5	0	4	4	54	19	-35	46	72	26	-9
12	13	10	-3	21	14	-7	50	43	-7	17	33	16	**9**
13	3	3	0	9	5	-4	51	32	-19	37	60	23	**4**
14	0	0	0	0	0	0	58	57	-1	42	43	1	0
15	13	11	-2	19	11	-8	45	44	-1	23	33	10	**9**
16	14	47	33	7	6	-1	57	29	-28	21	18	-3	-31
17	10	5	-5	33	14	-19	33	48	-15	24	33	9	-6
18	12	8	-4	16	0	-16	52	50	-2	20	42	22	**20**
19	0	0	0	18	0	-18	27	39	12	55	61	6	**18**
20	13	9	-4	6	9	3	72	41	-31	9	41	32	**1**

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Table 3. Growth Status.
Proficient plus Advanced in Math. Proficient plus Advanced in Reading. Proficient plus Advanced in Total Math and Reading.

Made Adequate Yearly Progress Every Year Since 2003. Selected for Study Due to Gains.

District	P+A Growth Mth	P+A Growth Rdg	P+A Total M+R	Made AYP	Sel for Study
1	0	0	0	N	
2	-12	0	-12	N	
3	**1**	**15**	**16**	N	
4	-14	-11	-25	N	
5	-8	**9**	**1**	N	
6	-6	**1**	-5	N	
7	**1**	**10**	**11**	Y	
8	-4	**10**	**6**	N	
9	-7	**20**	**13**	N	**Case 3**
10	-3	**3**	0	N	
11	-14	-9	-23	Y	
12	-25	**9**	-16	N	
13	**10**	**4**	**14**	N	
14	-20	0	-20	N	
15	**14**	**9**	**23**	N	**Case 2**
16	-17	-31	-48	N	
17	**5**	-6	-1	N	
18	-18	**20**	**2**	N	
19	**6**	**18**	**24**	Y	**Case 1**
20	1	-2	-1	Y	

Academic Gains and Adequate Yearly Progress

After a general review of the data, from the 2006 to the 2010 school year in math, only 6 of 20 or 30% of the 20 schools selected in the population made gains in the overall percentile of students moving to the proficient plus advanced column as measured by the Measured Progress criterion reference test. In reading, 12 of 20 or 60% of the 20 schools in the population made gains in the overall percentile of students moving to the proficient plus advanced column. In looking at the combination of math and reading improvement, 9 of 20 or 45% of the schools in the population made gains in the overall percentile of students moving to the proficient plus advanced column.

Four of 20 schools or 20% made Adequate Yearly Progress each year since 2003. Of those 4 schools, 2 had positive gains in performance by gains in the percentile of proficient + advanced in math and reading combined. Figure 2 provides an illustration of the above data.
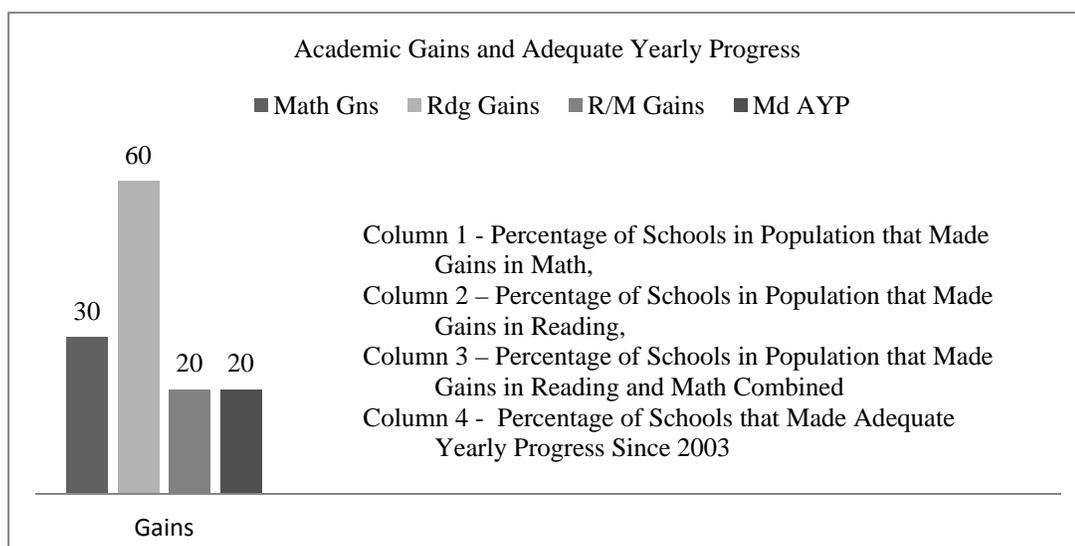
Figure 2. Academic Gains and Adequate Yearly Progress.

Cases Selected for Study

       The criterion for selecting schools for this multi case study was established as follows. Three school districts that had the highest net gain in reading and math combined from 2006 to 2010 on the Montcas criterion referenced test, who had superintendents that had served in that district for 8 or more years, who granted the researcher permission to be studied , and had no conflict of interest with the researcher were selected for the study.

       School district 19 was selected as Case 1 due to a 24 percentile net gain in reading and math. School district 15 was selected as Case 2 due to a 23 percentile net gain in reading and math. Originally, school district #3 was selected as Case 3 due to having the next highest percentile net gain of 16. However, after contacting that superintendent, permission to study the district was not granted. The next highest percentile net gain was found in school district 13 with a gain of 14 percentile. However, that district was eliminated from the study due to the fact that the researcher had served as a consultant in school improvement efforts in that district in the past and the researcher felt that this was a conflict of interest. Therefore, the next highest percentile gain (13) was in school district 9. The researcher was granted permission from school district 9 and this district became case number 3. The data for cases 1 2 and 3 are illustrated in the far right column of Figure 3. School district 19 was the only school district in the study to achieve adequate yearly progress (AYP) status each year from 2003 to 2010, even though AYP is not a primary data factor in this study,

Figure 3 illustrates the gains that these districts have made over a 5 year period. For all three cases, bar 1 shows the 2006 proficient plus advanced scores in math, bar 2 shows the 2010 proficient plus advanced scores in math, bar 3 shows the 2006 proficient plus advanced scores in reading and bar 4 shows the 2010 proficient plus advanced scores in reading.
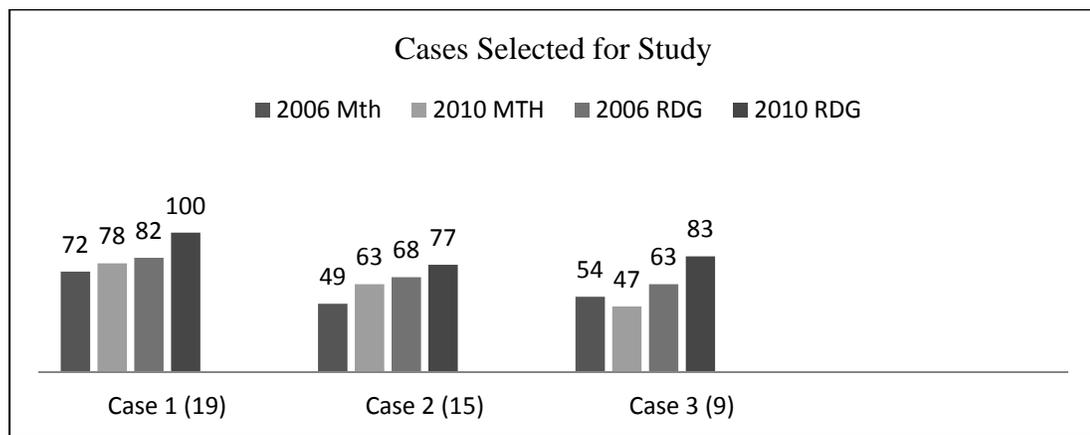
Figure 3. Cases Selected for Study.

Selected Cases Math Gains. Selected Cases Reading Gains
Case 1 (School 19) Case 2 (School 15) Case 3 (School 9)

Data Collection Procedures

During the onsite data collection phase, interviews with the superintendent, principals, eligible teachers and eligible school board trustees were conducted. To be eligible for interview as a teacher, the teacher needed to have taught in the district for at least 8 years. The rationale for this criteria was that teachers that were interviewed would have been in the district for at least as long as the superintendent. To be eligible for interview as a board member, the board member needed to have served on the board at least one term (3 years). The rationale for this criteria was that board members with at

least 3 years' experience should have a better knowledge base for what the superintendent does than a board member who is just starting their tenure on the board. In addition, observations of interaction between the superintendent, teachers and students was completed. Documents were also collected from the district and reviewed. Requested documents are listed in the document review protocol that can be found later in this chapter. During the interviews, questions were asked that were designed to aid in finding common themes. Prior to any interviews being conducted, a consent form was signed by each participant. The purpose and design of the study was reviewed with each participant and answers to any questions that participants had was provided. A digital audio tape recording of all interviews was made.

Protocol for Questions

In a case study involving a superintendent that had been in a school district for more than 20 years, Atherton (2008) gathered data from each participant that was used to determine their perceptions on superintendent behaviors. The interviews were semi-structured, with predetermined questions designed to target the specific perceptions of leadership as identified in the research. However, the questions were open-ended, giving the researcher the ability to expand upon the information given by the interviewee in order to develop an understanding of all of the relevant aspects surrounding the interviewee's perception of superintendent success. The interviewer restricted her questions to areas covered by the interview guide and issues raised directly by the interviewee (Atherton, 2008, p. 44).

Byrd (2001) established a protocol in questioning that provided a direct link between the questions being asked and the research questions identified in the study. For example, one of Byrd's research question included the superintendent's use of site based decision making. To answer this question, Byrd analyzed the superintendent's perceived use of site based decision making in the formulation of leadership decisions. Another example in this study was how a superintendent communicated expectations. To answer this question, Byrd investigated through questioning how often the superintendent communicates expectations such as communicating a vision and modeling expectations (Byrd, 2001).

Gibbings (2008) studied urban superintendent leadership and student achievement. To obtain necessary information, a 5-item open-ended superintendent interview protocol was used to determine how, when, and why successful urban superintendents in California used a variety of leadership strategies and practices to improve student learning. The interview protocol included the following five items:

1. Please describe your approach to leadership.

2. In what ways do you think superintendents of urban school districts can affect student achievement?

3. What are the most important leadership strategies and practices you have used as superintendent to improve student achievement in your district?

4. What were your reasons for selecting these leadership strategies and practices?

5. Imagine that I am a new superintendent of an urban school district much like your own and I was hired to improve student achievement. In addition, you were hired by my school board to be my leadership coach. What would you recommend my plan of action be for the first 90 days on the job? The first year? Second year? (Gibbings, 2008 p. 87)

In this study, the following questions form the basis for all interviews in each case;

1. Tell me about your background?

2. Tell me about the school and community that you currently serve in?

3. How are goals established in this district and what is your involvement in the process?

4. Do you have a school improvement process in your district?

5. Why has student achievement increased in your school district?

6. Why have you stayed in this district for as long as you have?

7. What conditions within the community have promoted your longevity?

Even though the questions are modified slightly to target the group being interviewed, the core questions are similar. Each interview began with open ended questions intended to get to know the participant and make them feel at ease. Questions were followed up on as needed and clarification was sought from each participant if necessary. In each question, a set of prompts were used by the researcher to probe the interviewee for specific information. The primary questions and prompts used to gain information regarding the two research questions in this study are as follows.

Interview Questions for Research Question 1

1. How are goals established in this district and what is your involvement in the

   process?

   - Importance of goals
   - Instructional goals
   - Non Instructional goals
   - When are goals established
   - School board involvement
   - Teacher involvement
   - Community involvement
   - Support of goals by school board
   - Support of goals by teaching staff
   - Alignment of goals to instruction
   - Alignment of resources to goals
   - Evaluation of goals
   - Has superintendent longevity been a contributing factor in goals

2. Do you have a school improvement process in your district?

   - What is it
   - Who is involved
   - Is it tied to the goals
   - If it is tied to the goals, how
   - How is it measured
   - What is your role in the improvement process
   - Has it contributed to achievement gains/if so, how
   - Has superintendent longevity been a contributing factor in school
     improvement

3. Why has student achievement increased in your school district?

   - Who has contributed
   - Goals
   - School improvement plan
   - School Board
   - Resource alignment
   - Principals roles
   - Superintendent role with principals
   - Autonomy level of principals
   - Monitoring of school goals by superintendent

- Monitoring of school goals by principals
- Collective efficacy
- Have you influenced achievement
- If so, what specific steps have been taken to increase achievement
- Has superintendent longevity influenced student achievement/if so how

Research justification for these questions are supported by the following studies. Marzano and Waters (2006) found that superintendents established non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction. There was school board alignment and support of student achievement goals. Goals were closely monitored and financial resources were allocated to support achievement and instructional goals. Building level autonomy at the principal level had a positive correlation with student achievement. Superintendents encouraged principals to take ownership in schools success (Waters and Marzano 2006). Marzano, Waters & McNulty (2005) determined that school leaders can have an impact on student achievement by employing 21 different leadership strategies. This includes promoting clear communication, developing a positive school culture, being flexible, establishing clear goals, inviting input, staying current with the latest theories and practices, and monitoring and evaluating the progress of employees and students. Additional responsibilities were in outreach to the community, establishing relationships and being visible (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Togneri & Anderson (2003) found that districts that focused on a system wide approach where curricular areas were focused on and instructional support was provided, made improvement. A common vision was established and adhered to, and decisions about improvement were based on data analysis. In regard to professional development, districts focused on a clearly identified set of strategies to improved instruction. Finally, districts that made

improvement committed to school reform over a period of several years (Togneri &

Anderson, 2003).

In a study that analyzed leadership to improve student achievement, Taylor (2010)

found that 7 consistent leadership practices emerged after analyzing data from 62 schools

in 10 different states. The primary leader action theme found in this study was focusing

on a culture of learning. The remaining 6 themes supported this primary theme. The

supporting themes were decision making for student learning, stimulation of intellectual

growth, personal investment in the change, the expectation of collaboration, strategic

planning for consistency and to expect and to support data based decision making.

Participants in this study were limited to leaders whose student achievement data

supported positive results. All leaders chosen where in schools where there was

improvement in student achievement.

> The goal setting processes in all cases were data-driven with an
> expectation of improvement. All schools were expected to align their
> school improvement plans and change efforts with the district identified
> goals and curriculum alignment with district funds allocated to support the
> needed improvement. Monitoring of student achievement and creation of
> predictive assessments and formulas was typical. Each of the district
> leaders interviewed expected the principals to support district goals, but
> gave the principals autonomy in selecting the pathway to achieve the goals
> with the understanding of accountability for success. (Taylor, 2010, p.14)

Hanks (2010) found no significant relationship in the constructs of student

achievement, the establishment of non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction,

board of trustee alignment and support of district goals, monitoring of goals for

achievement and instruction, use of resources to support achievement and instruction, and

the superintendents valuing of defined autonomy. Hanks concedes, however that

"the findings of this research demonstrate that for quantitative research to

effectively investigate the connection between school superintendent's practice of

collaborative goal setting and student achievement, greater detail must be given to

the research design and sampling framework." (Hanks 2010 p. 121)

Interview Questions for Research Question 2

1. Why have you stayed in this district for as long as you have? (the

    superintendent)

    - Relationship building with community
    - Communication style
    - Visibility in community
    - Transparency in governance style
    - Understanding and respecting local traditions
    - The relationship between ethics, advocacy and community relations
    - Relationship with the school board president
    - Relationships with the school board
    - Longevity of the school board
    - Salary and Benefits

2. What conditions within the community have promoted your longevity? (the

    superintendent

    - Community makeup
    - Fit within the community
    - Support level of schools in the community
    - Support and acceptance of your family within the community
    - Your children's education
    - Children and spouse involvement in community

Research justification for these questions are supported by the following studies.

Johnson (2005) found that superintendents who were accessible and worked to build a

close relationships to the community, respected local traditions and maintained

transparency in their governance style tended to stay in the position longer than those that didn't. This study cites the importance of building connections with community members and other district stakeholders such as teachers and parents. Extended tenure for superintendents was partially attributed to the understanding and connection to the community (Johnson, 2005).

Peterson and Williams (2007) found that public relations was how superintendents interacted with their community and maintained relationships with their school board president. The board president played a large role in the superintendent's relationship to the rest of the board and community and "garnered extra capitol as they were elected again to the chair by their fellow board members. As a result of their positions, the board president's perceptions of superintendents carried extra influence and legitimacy" (Peterson and Williams, 2007, p.12).

Byrd, Drews, and Johnson (2006) found that the average tenure decreased as the level of difficulty working with the board president or board members increased. Superintendents also cited increased politics as a contributing factor to instability in the profession. Superintendents new to a district spent more time in relationship building with the school board and community groups. Fiscal resources did not significantly affect tenure (Byrd, Drews, & Johnson, 2006).

Interview Protocol

What follows are interview questions that were used for each participant group. The entire interview protocol can be found in the appendix of this study.

Superintendent Interview Protocol and Questions

Superintendents interviewed in this study had been in the district for 8 or more years. The rationale for this is the superintendent would have exceeded the average longevity for a superintendents in United States public schools. This amount of time would provide an adequate knowledge base for the superintendent to comment on the questions. Each interview began with open ended questions intended to get to know the participant and make them feel at ease. Questions were followed up on as needed and clarification was sought from each participant as needed. What follows are interview questions for superintendents only.

1. Tell me about your background?

2. Tell me about the school and community that you currently serve in?

3. How are goals established in this district and what is your involvement in the process?

4. Do you have a school improvement process in your district?

5. Why has student achievement increased in your school district?

6. Why have you stayed in this district for as long as you have?

7. What conditions within the community have promoted your longevity?

Principal Interview Protocol and Questions

Each principal in the district was interviewed in this study. Each interview began with open ended questions intended to get to know the participant and make them feel at ease. Questions were followed up on as needed and clarification was sought from each participant as necessary. What follows are interview questions for the principals only.

1. Tell me about your background?

2. What is your involvement in the process of goal setting in this district?

3. Describe your school improvement process in your district and your involvement in it?

4. Why has student achievement increased in your school district?

5. The superintendent has been in this school district for a number of years. Why do you think he has stayed in for as long as he has?

6. What conditions within the community has promoted the superintendent's longevity?

Teacher Interview Protocol and Questions

Teachers that have been in the district for 8 years or longer were targeted for interviews. The rationale for this grouping was that the population of superintendents for this study was superintendents that have served in a district for 8 years or more which exceeds the national average. By using teachers with similar tenure, these teachers would have spent at least 8 years with this superintendent and would have a better knowledge of governance practices. Each interview began with open ended questions intended to get to know the participant and make them feel at ease. Questions were followed up on as needed and clarification sought from each participant if necessary. What follows are interview questions for the teachers only.

1. Tell me about your background.

2. What is your involvement in the process of goal setting in this district?

3. Describe your school improvement process in your district and your involvement in it?

4. Why has student achievement increased in your school district?

5. The superintendent has been in this school district for a number of years. Why do you think he has stayed in for as long as he has?

6. What conditions within the community have promoted the superintendent's longevity?

School Board Interview Protocol and Questions

School Board members that had been in the district for 3 years or longer were targeted for interviews. The rationale for this is that the school board member interviewed would have served at least one term with the current superintendent. This amount of time would provide a knowledge base for the school board member to comment on the questions. Each interview began with open ended questions intended to get to know the participant and make them feel at ease. Questions were followed up on as needed and clarification sought from each participant if necessary. What follows are interview questions for school board members only.

1. Tell me about your background, how long have you served on the school board and why is it important for you to serve?

2. What is your involvement in the process of goal setting in this district?

3. Why has student achievement increased in your school district?

4. The superintendent has been in this school district for a number of years. Why do you think he has stayed in for as long as he has?

5. What conditions within the community has promoted the superintendent's longevity?

Table of Specifications

Table 4 illustrates how each question correlates to the two research questions in this study. This is important information as it gives the researcher confidence that there are questions asked that will provide data from which to draw conclusions. In Table 4, the research questions are listed in the left hand column and the corresponding questions are listed in the right hand column.

Table 4. Table of Specifications.

Research Question 1	Interview Questions
How does superintendent longevity provide a context through programs, relationships and culture that supports and enhances student achievement in Montana Schools?	3. How are goals established in this district and what is your involvement in the process? 4. Do you have a school improvement process in your district? 5. Why has student achievement increased in your school district?
Research Question 2	**Interview Questions**
How do local conditions influence longevity of the superintendent?	6. Why has the superintendent stayed in this district for as long as he has? 7. What conditions within the community have promoted his longevity?

Document Review Protocol

Documents that provided support to the research questions in this study were requested to be reviewed. The following documents were requested for review.

1. Demographic information about the community.

2. Demographic information about the school.

3. Minutes of school board meetings where district goals are discussed and adopted.

4. Minutes of administrative meetings where district goals are discussed.

5. Minutes of faculty meetings where district goals are discussed.

6. The district's 5 year educational improvement plan.

7. The district's school improvement plan for regional accreditation if applicable.

8. Samples of superintendent communication with the community.

9. Samples of superintendent communication with the school board.

10. Samples of superintendent communication with principals.

11. Samples of superintendent communication with teachers.

Data Analysis

In order to analyze the data in this study, both a holistic and embedded analysis was utilized (Yin 2009). From the holistic view, the analysis was centered on the superintendent's life in the school district and how and why they were able to stay in one school district for multiple years. From the embedded view, the study analyzed specific traits and practices of the superintendent in relation to student achievement.

Through a thorough analysis of themes that developed from the data, the study revealed 3 findings related to how does superintendent longevity provides a context

through programs, relationships and culture that supports and enhances student achievement, and 1 finding regarding how local conditions influence the longevity of a superintendent. A narrative of all three cases was developed which include direct quotes from participants to support themes that emerged. These direct quotes along with documents and observation data provide validity to the study. Audio tapes of each interview was made to ensure accuracy during the transcription process.

Lichtman's (2006) three C's analysis, coding, categorizing to concepts was used to analyze raw data. This process breaks conversations into meaningful phrases that can be formulated into themes as the analysis progresses (Lichtman, 2006).

Once the audio data was transcribed, a set of analytic manipulations of the data was developed (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Creswell, 2007). Using this strategy, a data acquisition matrix of was developed and supporting data placed in the theme categories. To help analyze the data, frequency of events and responses was documented, and information was put in chronological order so a visual display of events and responses could be reviewed (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Creswell, 2007). Once the data was displayed in this manner, the "story" of the individual cases as well as similarities between the multi cases was developed. "The needed analytic strategy is your guide to crafting this story and only rarely will your data do the crafting for you" (Yin, 2009, p. 130).

To craft the story, Yin (2009) recommends a cross case synthesis which applies specifically to the analysis of multi cases. Cross case analysis treats each individual case study as a separate study and utilizes word tables that display the data from the individual

cases according to a uniform framework. This type of analysis provides information whether different groups of cases appear to share some similarity "and deserve to be considered instances of the same type of general case" (Yin, 2009, p. 160.)

These word tables appear in this study in the form of a data acquisition matrix which was developed to provide important information to the reader. In this matrix, the research questions are listed on the left side of the table with supporting data, represented by quotes from participants, placed in the right side of the matrix. This matrix provides immediate validation of the data and may give the reader security that the conclusions drawn are based on fact.

In the final interpretative phase, the meaning of the multi case study is reported. This phase determines what lessons were learned from this case study and how it aligns with current research (Creswell 2007).

<div align="center">Trustworthiness</div>

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) internal and external validity can be best described in qualitative research by using terms such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. "These terms are operationalized in the field of qualitative research by prolonged engagement in the field and the triangulation of data of sources, methods, and investigators to establish credibility" (Creswell, 2007, p. 204).

Credibility

The credibility criteria involves establishing that the results of qualitative research are credible or believable from the perspective of the participant in the research (Lincoln

and Guba, 1985). In this study, in order to insure credibility, digital audio recording equipment was used to ensure that the results were an accurate interpretation of the participant's meaning. Also, typed transcriptions of interviews were sent to each participant. Each participant had the opportunity to make comments and was asked to sign the transcript and mail it to the interviewer in a self-addressed stamped envelope. Ninety seven percent of participants signed their transcripts and sent them to the researcher. Follow-up contact was made with each superintendent once general themes had emerged. If the researcher had questions about content in a particular interview, that participant was contacted to answer the question.

Triangulation

According to Denzin (1978) and Patton (1999), there are several methods of triangulating data. In methods triangulation, the researcher analyzes the consistency of findings via a variety of data collection methods. In sources triangulation, the researcher examines the consistency of different data sources within the same methods, but in different settings or time periods. In analyst triangulation, the researcher may use an outside analyst or multiple observers to validate the data and in theory perspective triangulation, the researcher uses several theoretical perspectives to interpret the data.

This study used primarily methods and sources triangulation. Along with interviews, and observation, document review was also completed. During the interviews, previously determined questions were asked of all participants in order to gain a different perspective and to determine what common themes emerged from the

data. Observations were made of the superintendent's interaction with teachers,

students and board members.

Dependability

Dependability in qualitative research emphasizes the need for the researcher to

account for the ever changing context within which the research occurs (Lincoln and

Guba, 1985). To achieve dependability, the project was reviewed by the researcher's

Doctoral Committee at Montana State University. This review ensured identification of

and resolution of threats, weaknesses and faults in the study.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results could be confirmed or

corroborated by others. To enhance confirmability in this study, a reflexive journal was

used. This is a type of dairy where entries are made during the research process (Lincoln

and Guba, 1985). In these notes, the reasons for decisions and reflections on the process

was included. Also a process of checking and rechecking the data for consistent themes

was used. A log of contradictions in the data between those interviewed and observed

was noted.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can

be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). To

ensure there is adequate transferability, a through description of the methodology and the

content findings has been included in this study. It is important to leave a clear map for

those who attempt to duplicate the study. This map will include any assumptions that

were important to the research findings.

The Researcher as an Instrument

> The researcher for this study is considered an instrument.
>
> In qualitative research, the researcher collects data through examining documents, observing behavior, and interviewing participants. They may use protocol and an instrument for collecting data, but the researchers are the ones who actually gather the information. They do not tend to use or rely on questionnaires or instruments developed by other researchers. (Creswell, 2007, p. 38)

Key Assumptions and Boundaries

This study is based on the assumption that the school superintendent, principals,

teachers, and school board members have an opinion about the superintendent's influence

on student achievement and how local conditions influence longevity. This assumption is

based on the researchers belief that those who work in the school environment are

affected daily by the decisions made by a superintendent and that these decisions may

ultimately effect the academic performance of students. It is also the researchers belief

that those who work in the school environment have an opinion about what conditions

within the community influence a superintendent's longevity. This opinion might be

developed from observations of the superintendent in community functions. There is also

an assumption that each superintendent believes longevity in a school district is beneficial

to not only to them personally, but to the academic achievement of the students. This

assumption is based on the researcher's belief that job security is important to the

superintendent and their family and that the superintendent has a concern for the

academic achievement of students in the district. This study is bounded by data gathered

from 3 school districts with high academic achievement and who employ superintendents

with longer than average tenure in the district.

Timeframe for Study

It is important to have a clear timeline established in which to complete the study.

This helps the researcher to schedule events such as interviews and transcription in such a

manner that provides ample time to complete the study. The timeframe to complete this

study was from September 2011 through January 2012. Table 5 illustrates the

timeframe.

Table 5. Timeframe for Study.

September 2011	Submit research proposal to the Montana State University Internal Review Board for approval.
October 2011	Collect onsite data from all three schools in the study. Once this data is collected and transcribed, transcripts are sent to participants for members checking.
November 2011	Analyze data from schools in the multi case study and start to formulate common themes.
December/2011/January 2012	Complete analysis and write conclusion portion of the research study.
February 1st , 2012	Submit draft research study to Montana State University doctoral committee for review and comment.

Summary

This is a multi-case study of 3 school districts that have made significant gains in student achievement over a multiyear period while one superintendent has been at the helm. To establish a sample for this study, a population of school districts that had superintendents serving 8 or more years was established. Only schools that contained at least one elementary school and one high school were included in the population for this study. The rationale for this was in order to analyze longitudinal student achievement data, both an elementary and high school was needed in the same school district.

As of the date of this study, there were 25 Montana superintendents that met these criteria (Darrell Rud, School Administrators of Montana, June 2011)

In all three districts studied, the same superintendent has served in this district for at least 8 years and the school has gained in student achievement from 2006 to 2010. This growth establishes a foundation to analyze whether or not superintendent longevity provided a context through programs, relationships and culture that supports and enhances student achievement and how local conditions influence longevity.

During the onsite data collection, interviews were conducted and observations and document review occurred. Similar questions were asked of all participants in order to gain a different perspective and to determine what common themes emerged from the data.

It is the goal of the researcher to add to the literature base regarding the topic of superintendent influence on student achievement and what local conditions allow the superintendent to stay in one district for more than the national average. With this

information, we may be one step closer to determining how superintendent longevity

influences the academic achievement of students.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to analyze how superintendents with more than average longevity in one school district have influenced student achievement by providing a context through programs, relationships and culture that supports and enhances student achievement in their school. The second purpose was to determine how local conditions or characteristics of the community influence the longevity of the superintendent. Waters and Marzano (2006), Metcalfe (2008), and Myers 2011) found that several actions by a superintendent contribute to increased student achievement. They also found that superintendent longevity has a positive correlation to student achievement. While this research provides evidence that superintendent longevity influences student achievement, there is limited research that reveals how superintendent longevity contributes to student achievement. There were two research questions for this study; How does superintendent longevity provide a context through programs, relationships and culture that supports and enhances student achievement and how do local conditions influence longevity of a superintendent?

To answer these questions, 3 school districts were analyzed. Each district employs a superintendent who has worked in the district for at least 8 years, which is longer than the national average, and whose school district has had increased net gains in reading and math over a 6 year period. In this chapter, an overall description of the

district and participants is provided, themes that have developed are described, not only

in each district, but cross case themes are described as well.

Case 1 – The Buffalo School District

Demographics

The Buffalo School District is located in northwestern Montana in a beautiful

valley surrounded by majestic mountains. Bordering the district is a national park which

encompasses thousands of acres. The park is unique for its mixture of grand mountains

and hot springs that flow into pristine rivers. Tourists from all over the world flock to the

park every year. Buffalo has become a center of activity serving as the original and only

year round entrance to the park. According to the Buffalo Chamber of Commerce, in the

summer and fall, recreational activities include fishing, hiking, horseback riding, pack

trips, rafting and hunting.

Buffalo has had a varied history from gold rushes to railroad development. Due

to the tourist trade, Buffalo has several motels, restaurants, and art galleries. It is a town

of 800 people, but swells to over 2000 residents in the summer. According to

Superintendent John Antelope, the community of Buffalo is like a boiling river.

> The community of Buffalo is kind of like a boiling river. The boiling
> river flows in to the Buffalo River and it is a great place for people to
> soak. If the water is too cold, you move into the hot water or if it gets too
> hot you move out into the colder water. So it is a nice mixture. That is the
> way this community is. (Superintendent John Antelope, October 2011)

There is an influence of ranching that is still evident but not as dominate as it used to be.

The park influences the community because of the managers that live and work in the

park. "We include the students and families from the park in our school through a

cooperative agreement. Federal law allows us to serve those students in the park"

(Superintendent John Antelope, October 2011).

Enrollment in the Buffalo School District has decreased recently and it may

decrease again.

> We have had 255 students K-12 for a 7 year period. We dropped down to 235 last year and now we are at 218 students so we are seeing a decline. We have had the gold mine close over 10 years ago. We have high expectations for our school and those parents. They move in from across the county to work up at the park, and they have the expectations for their children that were the same that they had as they were educated throughout the United States. The park management have had their kids going through this school and have graduated, or they are just about at the end of their school careers. So we are seeing a drain of management. So as they step away and retire, we are going to see an increase in our numbers. We are seeing a bit of a decrease but we are anticipating that it will come back around. (Superintendent John Antelope, October 2011)

The Buffalo School District is governed by a 6 member school board with one

nonvoting member. According Superintendent Antelope, there are currently two board

members that are in their second year of serving, 1 board member that is in their 6th year,

and two board members that are in their 7th year. "The two that have 2 years or less

replaced board members that had served anywhere from 13 to 16 years" (Superintendent

John Antelope, October 2011).

Participants in the Study

During the onsite data collection phase, interviews with the superintendent,

principals, board members and teachers were completed. To be eligible for interview as a

teacher, the teacher needed to have taught in the district for at least 8 years. The rationale

for this criteria was that teachers that were interviewed would have been in the district for

at least as long as the superintendent. To be eligible for interview as a board member, the

board member needed to have served on the board at least one term (3 years). The

rationale for this criteria was that board members with at least 3 years' experience should

have a better knowledge base for what the superintendent does than a board member who

is just starting their tenure on the board.

Reflections by the Researcher

This school district was somewhat of a challenge to get scheduled. When the

researcher contacted the superintendent, although he was interested, he said that the

project must first be presented to the school board. It was relayed that this was

problematic due to fact that it might compromise the confidentiality of the school district.

The superintendent then said that he would get back to the researcher. After two weeks,

the superintendent called and gave the green light to proceed. Although the researcher

was happy to get the opportunity to move forward, there was a sense of tension in the

district when the onsite data collection began. During the onsite data collection, the

researcher detected apprehension for teachers to be interviewed and it was not entirely

clear why. This may be due to the researcher's presence which may have been a

distraction to the school day. The superintendent was helpful in giving access to a list of

teachers and board members who would be eligible for the study. As the interviews

proceeded, and the data was collected, there seemed to be a feeling that the questions that

were being asked were entirely new territory and no one had really thought about how the

superintendent influenced student achievement. This was enlightening for the researcher to note.

Participants in the Buffalo School District

In the Buffalo School District, there were a total of 10 participants in the study. Participants included the superintendent, the K-12 principal, 2 trustees and 6 teachers. Based on the criteria identified for this study, this represents 100% of administration, 50% of eligible trustees, and 50% of eligible teachers. Table 6 provides the interviewee's pseudo name and years of service in the school district.

Table 6. Participants in the Buffalo School District.

Superintendent John Antelope	9th year in school district
Principal Bob Elkhorn	2nd year in school district
Trustee Jerry Duckworth	7th year on school board
Trustee Brenda Bruin	4th year on school board
Teacher Helen Hide	11th year in school district
Teacher Donald Bearclaw	21st year in school district
Teacher Mary Trout	28th year in school district
Teacher Kristie Moosehead	36th year in school district
Teacher Holly Salmon	14th year in school district
Teacher Jenny Bighorn	9th year in school district
Percentage of Eligible Administration Interviewed	100%
Percentage of Eligible Trustees Interviewed	50%
Percentage of Eligible Teachers Interviewed	50%

The Development of Themes

       The purpose of this study was to analyze how superintendents with more than average longevity in one school district have influenced student achievement by providing a context through programs, relationships and culture that supports and enhances student achievement in their school. The second purpose was to determine how local conditions or characteristics of the community influence the longevity of the superintendent. In order to uncover this data, the next step in this process was the identification of themes.

       In order to analyze the data in this study, both a holistic and embedded analysis was utilized (Yin 2009). From the holistic view, the analysis was centered on the superintendent's life in the school district and how and why they were able to stay in one school district for multiple years. From the embedded view, the study analyzed specific traits and practices of the superintendent in relation to student achievement.

Themes within the Buffalo School District

       In the Buffalo School District, 5 themes emerged from the data. What follows is an analysis of each theme through the eyes of the teachers, administration and school board in the Buffalo School District.

<div align="center">Theme 1</div>

       Goals are derived from data analysis driven from staff in collaboration with administration.

<u>Superintendent Interview</u>

Goals in the Buffalo School District are not developed from a top down strategic manner, but rather "bubble up" from the staff and are then supported by the administration. This is a strongly supported idea and was cited as a strategy by the superintendent.

> The goals that we seem to establish are more about the intrinsic value placed on them by the teachers. So we look at the data, and we appreciate where we are, but this staff has the mindset that we want to do better; so for example, our reading has been at 100% at the elementary for several years. We have been working on our math. We have brought in a math trainer, and that was a result of teachers going to Seattle for a national Response to Intervention (RTI) conference. And they came back and they said, here is somebody we should look at training; so we brought the trainer in. Here is my take on our elementary teachers; when they go after a goal, they are very enthusiastic about it; very single minded about it. They could go out and take down a moose without any weapons or instruments. They are that adamant about pursuing their goals. (John Antelope, Superintendent, October 2011)

When asked if goals "bubble up" from teachers, Superintendent Antelope stated that it is easy to get a staff moving in the right direction when they are already pointed in the right direction. They are the ones that are moving toward a goal, and he looks for ways to help them along. "So if it is curriculum changes that they need, or if it is professional development that they need, then we are going to equip them towards that goal" (John Antelope Superintendent October 2011).

<u>Board Member Interviews</u>

According to board member Jerry Duckworth, data also is provided to the school board. "The board looks at student enrollment monthly just because it does fluctuate so

much. They also bring in data about the RTI program." (Jerry Duckworth, Board

Member, October 2011)

Principal Interviews

According to principal Bob Elkhorn, the RTI program (Response to Intervention)

is central to the goal setting efforts in the district.

> Much of goal setting is done through the RTI program. We look at a lot of
> data through that program. We have a goal of having students out of RTI
> when they exit the elementary school. As far as top down goals, since I
> have been here, they have gone through the principal, through our staff
> and centered in our RTI program. (Bob Elkhorn, Principal, October 2011)

Teacher Interviews

Teacher Helen Hide discussed the fact that teachers set individual goals as well.

"The goals that I know of are individual teacher goals; which tend to fall in line with the

school mission statement which is in line with community goals" (Helen Hide, Teacher,

October 2011). Teacher Mary Trout confirmed that top down goal setting is not the norm

in the Buffalo School District.

> There is not like school involved goal setting. I have been involved in the
> development of the mission statement.. They (administration) come to us
> and ask us about different things as to whether or not we are willing to
> take something on.   The latest was the RTI program and the SPED
> (Special Education) cooperative asked us about being involved in that.
> They (the administration) wanted our school to be a pilot and we were
> chosen. Once something like that is presented, we don't make it a formal
> goal, but we made it our mission to make that work and work on those
> interventions. Our goal is always to have kids do well on the CRT's
> (Criterion Referenced Tests). I think we really try to stick to NCLB (No
> Child Left Behind), and meeting AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) every
> year. I think the goals are set more at a personal level and we as a group

of faculty talk about if there is a group of students that are not doing well, we come up with a plan to help them. (Mary Trout, Teacher, October 2011)

According to Holly Salmon, teachers set high standards through their goal setting process.

"We have goals to have excellence beyond just passing standardized tests. I teach two AP (Advanced Placement) classes. We have extremely high goals. It is almost understood that our students will work at a high level and we will prepare them for college." (Holly Salmon, Teacher, October 2011)

Theme 2

Student achievement has increased due to hiring and maintaining good teachers and moving out weak teachers. These teachers are of high caliber who work well together, exhibit pride, high expectations and compassion for the student body.

Superintendent Interview

Hiring and maintaining a high caliber staff is critical to Superintendent John Antelope. He has felt fortunate to have a solid foundation in which to begin when he became Superintendent 8 years ago.

It has been easy to build on the base that was already here. A lot of the staff were here under the previous superintendent's leadership. He had put into place some good hires; and I think we have been able to continue to put the right people on the bus. Some teachers were not willing to adapt to some of the changes that we have been making so rather than saboteurs or blockers; they simply left. (John Antelope, Superintendent, October 2011)

When asked what importance he placed on hiring and maintaining good teachers, Superintendent Antelope had the following response;

Jim Collins wrote the book, Good to Great (Collins, 2001). His philosophy is that you want to look for that exceptional teacher. So we take seriously the fit of our teachers within this community. Not only the teachers, but also our classified staff and our coaches. We want the best adults working with our kids. And we have had the luxury to embrace that philosophy. We have been able to have that exceptional teacher in our school. Staffing is key. (John Antelope, Superintendent, October 2011)

Principal Interview

Principal Elkhorn also sees the value of high quality teachers.

"We have a lot of teachers that have been around for a long time and they are invested in high student achievement. There could be something said for the fact of the continuity of staff and the superintendent playing a role in that." (Bob Elkhorn, Principal, October 2011).

Board Member Interviews

There is also a belief from board member Duckworth that teachers are key to success in Buffalo. According to Mr. Duckworth, the teachers themselves are caring and compassionate to the student body; wanting to help them along. "The teaching staff is high caliber and have good longevity in the district. I have been impressed with the amount of teachers that have worked in the district for 10 or more years" (Jerry Duckworth, Board Member, October 2011). When asked if that was important Mr. Duckworth replied that it depended but that holding on to good quality teachers for a certain time is a good thing.

"I have seen some that have come through the district that have been stuck in a rut and are just trying to finish out their career. But with young vibrant teachers that have served 10 or more years, it is nice to see that." (Jerry Duckworth Board Member October 2011)

This sentiment was shared by board member Brenda Bruin. According to Bruin,

the district has a lot of teachers that have been around for a long time, and they are

invested in high student achievement. "The district has a steady employment base so not

only do we have a lot of teachers that stay, but we also have a lot of families that stay"

(Brenda Bruin, Board Member, October 2011).

Teacher Interviews

Teacher Helen Hide describes the motivation of the teachers in Buffalo.

> To a certain extent, every teacher wants to do their best; the school and
> parents have high expectations. I think whenever you have success and
> you have kids that are successful, that becomes the benchmark. As
> teachers we continue to increase the benchmark. And kids look at where
> those former students ended up; they want to become the benchmark. I
> feel that this school could go "south" really fast if the teachers decided
> they didn't want to work very hard. (Helen Hide, Teacher, October 2011)

High School teacher Donald Bearclaw gives a lot of credit for the success of the school

district to the elementary school.

> I think the elementary has had more benchmarks and goals to meet
> certainly when No Child Left Behind came in. It certainly makes life a lot
> easier at the high school level. We all get some of the credit, but certainly
> the elementary school has had more goal setting efforts. They can do life
> changing things. It helped both of my children. You have to be able to
> hire the right people. Hiring is very important. (Donald Bearclaw
> Teacher October 2011)

According to Teacher Mary Trout, motivation in staff is important.

> I think (it is important) if you have a motivated staff who works well
> together. I think that helps because we sit around and discuss; so and so
> is not doing well, so what can we do? In this district, the staff has done a
> lot to keep the ball rolling. When staff does not work well together, lack
> of leadership tends to filter down. When this happens, the lack of
> administrative leadership tends to cause problems. (Mary Trout Teachers
> October 2011)

When asked whether or not consistency and longevity of staff is important, teacher

Kristie Moosehead replied as follows. "It is huge. Even in a school our size, the

superintendent is not in the classroom. But the fact that he has picked the right faculty

and kept them here is important; and believing teachers when they say we need to do

this" (Kristie Moosehead October 2011). Teacher Holly Salmon cited the ability of

teachers to work together to solve problems.

> Our staff does not have a lot of turnover. We work really well together.
> Our staff on the secondary level set very high expectations. When kids do
> not meet these expectations, we intervene. Due to our high expectations, I
> know I can assign (an assignment) and have it supported with the same
> level of expectations in other classes. We talk about it as a staff; about
> keeping our expectations high. (Holly Salmon October 2011)

According to teacher Jenny Bighorn one of the big reasons for the school's success is

that the staff remains very stable.

> Even though we are a gate community and we have a lot of people that
> move in and out, there is an indigenous population that doesn't move.
> Programs like the RTI program survived 3 different principals in 3 years.
> Not because of the principals, but because the staff members were
> invested. I think the staff members, not just for RTI but in general have a
> lot of pride in high scores. The CRT (Criterion Referenced Test) scores
> are always brought up as a sense of pride. (Jenny Bighorn October 2011)

Theme 3

Student Achievement has increased due to the Response to Intervention Program.

Superintendent Interview

The Buffalo School District was one of the original pilot schools to became part

of the Response to Intervention Program. This program appears to be one of the major

contributors to high student achievement in the district. According to the National Center

on Response to Intervention, this program involves a multi-level prevention program that

includes levels of intensity or prevention of students falling behind in school. The

primary prevention level includes high quality instruction. The second level includes

evidenced based intervention of moderate intensity and the third level includes

individualized intervention of increasing intensity for struggling students. Student

progress is continually monitored and this monitoring is used to assess a student's

academic performance. Programmatic decisions as to how to intervene to improve

student performance is based on data. Data analysis and decision making occurs at all

levels of the RTI implementation and at all levels of instruction (National Center on

Response to Intervention). Superintendent Antelope cites RTI as a primary factor to the

schools achievement levels.

> We were one of 3 schools in Montana that were chosen to take part in the pilot program of RTI. We have had great success. The data shows that this program is positively affecting the students by getting them equipped with the skills they need.
> We are continuing to embrace that. We have had the elementary school using RTI for several years and we just included the junior high program within the last two years. I have seen the RTI process work in such a positive fashion. (John Antelope, Superintendent, October 2011)

Principal Interview

According to Principal Elkhorn, RTI has been central to student success at all

levels.

> The biggest reason (for growth in achievement) is the implementation of RTI. This was implemented top down. The support from the superintendent and (former) principal were key in this implementation. Through changeover of administrators, it has not missed a beat. We have

the same facilitator, the same key people involved. (Bob Elkhorn, Principal, October 2011)

Board Member Interviews

Board Member Jerry Duckworth also credits the RTI program as another benefit to student achievement.

This school was one of the pilot schools for that. That has been helpful. Obviously there is not one thing ever, it is usually a combination. But I really think the RTI program throughout the elementary school has had a big impact on our school improvement. (Jerry Duckworth, Board Member, October 2011)

Although she wasn't able to put a finger on why the Buffalo School District was increasing in student achievement, board member Brenda Bruin also credited the RTI program. "One thing I would be curious about is the implementation of our RTI program. I would have to think that has be a factor. We were one of the prototype programs" (Brenda Bruin Board, Member, October 2011).

Teacher Interviews

Teacher Kristie Moosehead credits the teachers for promoting the student achievement through the RTI program.

Part of that (student achievement) is the RTI program. That is huge. That came from the teachers; they (the teachers) said we need to do that and the principals, the superintendent and the school board bought into it. They (administration and board) have supported it to make sure they (elementary teachers) get training and making sure they (elementary teachers) get time out of class to have their RTI meetings. It is time intensive. It only goes up to 7th grade, but it is huge for test scores. I think we (high school teachers) just reap the benefits. (Kristie Moosehead October 2011)

Jenny Bighorn also credits the RTI program as a central component in student success.

> The RTI has been a big part of our elementary school. We are one of 5 sustaining schools in the state. The RTI process effectively identifies struggling students. It also effectively identifies parts of our curriculum that are weak because we see that weakness in students that struggle. So not only does it help students who are struggling, but it also helps us find where we need to beef up instruction. I think the RTI effectively identifies anyone who is struggling and fills in holes and provides extra instruction. Some students are in RTI for 5 years and never make it to Special Education. The effect is that we have very few students in the elementary school who don't meet the proficient range in math and reading; particularly in reading. I have a feeling we are close to 100% in reading (test scores) in the elementary school. (Jenny Bighorn, Teacher, October 2011)

Theme 4

Superintendent longevity has influenced student achievement through good leadership, support for professional development, financial support and support of ideas through his role as instructional leader.

Superintendent Interview

A key theme in the Buffalo School District is the fact that superintendent longevity influenced student achievement through support. This support is expressed though terms such as good leadership, support for professional development for teachers, providing financial resources for training and extra staff and the superintendent's role as the instructional leader. Superintendent Antelope feels this is one of the primary roles that he has played in the district. The district has had financial resources over the years to provide this support and many acknowledge that it has been this financial support that has been a key factor.

It is the support of the teachers which results in support of the students; financially and (through) innovation that makes sense to me; to be able to match the strengths of teachers to see how it is going to affect students in the most positive manner. I know every student by name. I have a natural rapport with students. I see that as essential by demonstrating to students that their activities are important to me. I attend as many events as I can. I am very visible. I will also talk to them about their events. I try to have that same familiarity with the staff; to know about them; to show that I care. Part of that support also is to be able to take on some of the tasks so it does not overburden one person. I am involved in academic changes and staffing and the principal oversees (these changes) to make sure it is carried out. I don't want to be the "Christmas tree superintendent"; that whatever I put up, when I leave it comes down. I want effective long lasting learning; not a fad. When I see a program that is innovative and helps students, I am a huge advocate. If it is a fad, I am really skeptical. I want our district moving forward, but I don't want to be on the cutting edge of being a fad. So I don't mind us being a few steps behind to make sure it is not a fad. I look at what is going to last. Professional development has been a large factor for teachers and classified staff. We have embraced technology. We also have matched up teachers with their professional development needs. When there is a compelling need, we have brought trainers in and on occasion have invited county wide schools in to help fill the slots. (John Antelope, Superintendent, October 2011)

Principal Interview

Principal Elkhorn credits superintendent Antelope with support of programs that are not generally mainstream.

Some programs, particularly youth and government and model UN (United Nations) are programs he (the superintendent) has supported and considers them as part of the schools gifted and talented offerings. These are huge programs. These offerings give students that are not attached to athletic a connection. With technology, the superintendent has been very supportive of ideas. I think the direct link (to student achievement) is that you support your teachers, you support your administrators, you support the people in the school and you provide the important resources. I think longevity plays a role. (Bob Elkhorn, Principal, October 2011)

<u>School Board Interviews</u>

From the school board level, leadership is key to the success of the school.

Having great leadership from the superintendent standpoint and the principal standpoint definitely helps a lot. Great leadership helps out a lot. He (the superintendent) definitely has the instructional background so I think he can discuss with teachers and with parents as to how curriculum works. He (the superintendent) understands the budget well and also helps the board in understanding different ways we could go with the budget to support different programs. I am fairly certain that the teaching staff knows that he supports them. (Jerry Duckworth, Board Member, October 2011)

When asked about the superintendent's role in student achievement, board member

Brenda Bruin describes it this way;

I think he relies on others in the school to make recommendations, and I think he has been supportive of programs such as the RTI program. He certainly makes efforts to get out of the district to be involved in trainings such as the school board association and other opportunities at a high level in the state; getting information on new trends in the state and trying to pass that off to staff. So in that way he is very supportive and responsive for programs. For the RTI, I don't think we could have been a prototype school without the superintendent being supportive. There has to be something said about the consistency factor. (Brenda Bruin, Board Member, October 2011)

<u>Teacher Interviews</u>

From a teacher's perspective, in regard to support for programs from the

superintendent, Teacher Helen Hide expresses it this way.

Administration has been very supportive of teachers going to conferences. You never really have felt that you would be told no. You push to find new things because you knew it was pretty likely that you could implement that. He (the superintendent) allowed the RTI program to be implemented. He put money towards that. It required another staff member, it required sending teachers to training. I always felt that he cared if I was starting a new program; that he felt that what I was doing was good and he was excited to hear about it and wanted to know more. So in general, he was enthusiastic. (Helen Hide, Teacher, October 2011)

When asked whether or not the superintendent's longevity has contributed to those gains,

Ms. Hide stated;

> Yes, I think there is a sense of security. I think consistency and longevity of administrators is very important as long as their heart is in the right place. A superintendent needs to ask, "what do I have to do to encourage my teachers to work hard, to make them feel that they make a difference; to give them the tools they need to make a difference?" The superintendent is more like the captain of the ship. He doesn't affect me daily, but he does effect the overall tone of the school. If you have the same superintendent, it is likely that you would have the same staff. And with the same staff, you are able to create consistency. (Helen Hide, Teacher, October 2011)

The importance of support from the superintendent was echoed by Teacher Mary Trout.

> To make RTI work it takes a ton of man power and a ton of materials; purchasing materials, adding paraprofessionals and training. If we need training, if we need an extra person, and budgeting that, we are given support. He (the superintendent) has always been supportive with training, extra manpower and with interventions. We are fortunate we have financial means that other districts don't have. We are rarely turned down (for requests). But he is lucky; he (the superintendent) has the group of people he has. (Mary Trout, Teacher, October 2011)

When asked whether or not the superintendent's longevity had anything to do with

improving student achievement Ms. Trout responded as follows;

> Yes because RTI has been such a huge part of our elementary program and he has been in on it from the very beginning. If he came in the middle and had to learn the process, I think that would stunt your growth a little bit. We have improved in scores because we've been to trainings, trainings have come here. (Mary Trout, Teacher, October 2011)

When asked whether or not the superintendent has influenced student achievement,

teacher Donald Bearclaw stated that the primary way was the superintendent has to

provide the funding and has to understand at some level what teachers want and need.

His credit comes in finding the funding.

That is as direct as he or she has time to do. They (the superintendent) are not the ones in the trenches. But if the "trenches "say we need this and they (the superintendent) find the money, then they are the hero. They (the superintendent) have to be given some credit. (Donald Bearclaw, Teacher, October 2011)

Other comments from teachers regarding the superintendent's role in achievement gains include that the superintendent's main role has been support of teachers and that he supports academics over sports. "When decisions are made, they are made with the idea that academics come first. He (the superintendent) has always supported academic extracurricular such as speech and debate. I think he sees that academics come first" (Holly Salmon, Teacher, October 2011). Salmon goes on to say that support and longevity of a superintendent are both important to student achievement because the superintendent needs to understand the staff they have to work with.

> If you been here long enough, you know you can trust this teacher to get this done. I think you can understand the goals of the community. The superintendent is kind of the bridge between the school and the community, and I think the longer he is here, he understands who reaches the goals of the school and who does not. And hopefully, you work with the teachers that need help. (Holly Salmon, Teacher, October 2011)

Teacher Jenny Bighorn concludes this theme in the following manner;

> Administration has always been very generous in bringing in extra resources. So I wonder if we just have more resources than other school districts do or we use them well? As a special education teacher, I have never been told that I cannot have resources and staff to enhance the program. The question (from the superintendent) always comes; do you have enough help, do you have enough help, let me know if you do not have enough help? And I'm not getting special treatment for that; everyone is getting that. The superintendent is very generous in his giving of financial funds for things. (Jenny Bighorn, Teacher, October 2011)

When asked how this support links to student achievement and how the superintendent's longevity has linked to student achievement, Ms. Bighorn said

I think that links very directly to student achievement. It encourages teachers to try new things and bring things into their curriculum. A lot of academic programs that a lot of school districts cannot afford, we have afforded year after year after year. As far as professional development, the principal comes to the staff, the staff says that we need to improve in this area. We discuss options as to what can be done and if we need help, the administration goes about getting help. (Jenny Bighorn Teacher October 2011)

<u>Theme 5</u>

The conditions within the community that promote the superintendent's longevity are the fact that it is a good community to raise a family, the superintendent likes the school, and the school board has supported the superintendent through an extended contract.

<u>Superintendent Interview</u>

This theme centers around the second research question in this study; how local conditions or characteristics of the community influence the longevity of the superintendent. Responses on this topic centered around three main topics; the community is a great place to raise a family, the superintendent likes the school and the school board has been supportive of the superintendent through the offer of an extended contract. In Montana, school boards are allowed through law to offer a superintendent a three year contract. And in some schools superintendents are offered a "rolling" three year contract which means that every year, the board offers the superintendent a new three year contract which gives the superintendent essentially 3 and ½ years of security since most superintendent contracts are offered in January. As to the conditions within

the community of Buffalo that promote longevity, Superintendent Antelope sums it up in

the following manner;

> This is a great community to raise kids. The support system is such that if an adult sees a child doing something wrong, they are not hesitant to approach that student. Everybody's mind set is to work, to challenge the students towards greater ideals. It is a huge factor. I think it is the best education my kids can receive not only in Montana, but perhaps in the nation. The board; they gave me a 2 year contact right off. They have been extremely supportive. (John Antelope, Superintendent, October 2011)

Board Member Interview

> Board member Jerry Duckworth points out the positive aspects of the school.

> He really likes the area and loves the school. There is a lot of school spirit. He is very attached to this school. He has had a very supportive board. It's a good place to hang on. From a professional standpoint he continues to be challenged. He can be a leader in education in Montana. He knows a lot of people. The small school interactions are what he thrives on from the sporting events to the individual interactions. His family has thrived in this community as well. (Jerry Duckworth, Board Member, October 2011)

Board member Brenda Bruin believes that part of it has to be that he likes the

community and a trend of stability in the superintendent position in the community over

the years.

> There has not been a trend of turnover of superintendents in this district. There may have been an expectation of someone that would stay in the district. Board support has been a primary factor and one of the reasons he stayed. The contract provided stability by extension of the contract. (Employment) contract security has to factor in. (Brenda Bruin, Board Member, October 2011)

Teacher Interview

Teacher Helen Hide describes Superintendent Antelope's longevity as follows;

"He has a large family so if you can make your school successful, your kids can

obviously benefit from that. So why would you leave here? He had a very favorable

board for a long time" (Helen Hide, Teacher, October 2011). Teacher Donald Bearclaw

cites key factors in the superintendent's decision to stay are his young family as well as

being a great school and the right size (Donald Bearclaw, Teacher, October 2011).

Teachers Mary Trout and Kristie Moosehead describe the superintendent's

longevity in terms of his investment in the community and the place he wants to raise his

family. They also acknowledge that his children are receiving a good education. It is

where he wants to raise his family (Mary Trout, October 2011; Kristie Moosehead,

Teachers, October 2011). The importance of family and community is echoed by teacher

Jenny Bighorn.

> I think he has 5 children in the district and he and his wife wanted to move
> back to the district. It is a great place to raise a family. It is a friendly
> school district and provides a great education, I think he likes the area.
> (Jenny Bighorn, October 2011)

Document Review

Document review was a part of this study. Documents that provided support to

the research questions in this study were requested to be reviewed. The following

documents were requested for review.

1. Demographic information about the community.

2. Demographic information about the school.

3. Minutes of school board meetings where district goals are discussed and adopted.

4. Minutes of administrative meetings where district goals are discussed.

5. Minutes of faculty meetings where district goals are discussed.

6. The district's 5 year educational improvement plan.

7. The district's school improvement plan for regional accreditation if applicable.

8. Samples of superintendent communication with the community.

9. Samples of superintendent communication with the school board.

10. Samples of superintendent communication with principals.

11. Samples of superintendent communication with teachers.

Superintendent Antelope provided the following documents for review; demographics of the town of Buffalo and surrounding areas; samples of communication to parents, teachers, school board and community; report cards to the public from 2007/08 school year through the 2009/10 school year. The demographics were used as a part of this study and helped verify demographic information that was provided by Superintendent Antelope. In the sample communication to parents, student enrollment data was provided which assists in giving parents a sense of what funding levels might be as a result of the state funding formula that is based primarily on student enrollment. This data was provided for multiple years so parents could see enrollment trends in the district. Also contained in community communication were dates of student events, parent teacher conferences, reminders about the process for applying for free and reduced

lunch and congratulations on student conduct. An explanation regarding compliance with the No Child Left Behind law was also provided. This information contained a notice to parents as to the information that they might request regarding their child's classroom teacher. The remaining documentation dealt primarily with general information shared with the teachers and school board. The documentation helped provide supplemental information that illustrated the culture of the school and community in which the superintendent lives and works. It also provided information about efforts of the superintendent in creating a positive culture within the school district.

Observations

Several hours over a two day period was spent gathering data and observing Superintendent Antelope. During the first day of the onsite visit, Superintendent Antelope was observed as he interacted with teachers and students. He spent a great deal of time in the teacher's lounge talking with teachers as they came in and out of the lounge. He greeted them in a positive manner and asked about their day and activities that were coming up. He also spent time in the hallways greeting students by name and asking about their day and what activities were coming up. On day two he spent time speaking with secretaries, maintenance personnel and a board member in the office commons area. In all interactions Superintendent Antelope was pleasant, upbeat and focused on listening to what individuals had to say. Research question 1 asks how does superintendent longevity provide a context through programs, relationships and culture that supports and enhances student achievement? This mode of communication certainly

contributes to the relationships and culture of the school by creating a positive and open

relationship with the superintendent.

Data Acquisition Matrix

Table 7 contains a data acquisition matrix for the Buffalo School district. This

matrix has been developed to provide important information and validation of the themes.

Each theme is listed in the first column and followed by supporting data in the form of

quotes.

Table 7. Data Acquisition Matrix.

Theme 1
Goals are derived from data analysis driven from staff in collaboration with administration.

The goals that we seem to establish are more about the intrinsic value placed on them by the teachers. So we look at the data, and we appreciate where we are, but this staff has the mindset that we want to do better; Here is my take on our elementary teachers; when they go after a goal, they are very enthusiastic about it, very single minded about it. They could go out and take down a moose without any weapons or instruments. They are that adamant about pursuing their goals." (**John Antelope, Superintendent, October 2011**)
Whenever that data is available, it always seems to come to the board. We look at student enrollment monthly just because it does fluctuate so much. They also bring in data about the RTI program." (**Jerry Duckworth, Board Member, October 2011**)

Table 7. Data Acquisition Matrix (continued).

Theme 1 - continued

Goals are derived from data analysis driven from staff in collaboration with administration.

"We look at a lot of data through the (RTI) program. We have a goal of having students out of RTI when they exit the elementary school. As far as top down goals, since I have been here, they have gone through principals position through our staff and centered in our RTI program." (**Bob Elkhorn, Principal, October 2011**)

"The goals that I know of are individual's teachers goals; which tend to fall in line with the school mission statement which is in line with community goals." (**Helen Hide, Teacher, October 2011**)

"There is not like a school involved goal setting. They (administration) come to us and ask us about different things as to whether or not we are willing to take something on. I think the goals are set more at a personal level and we as a group of faculty talk about if there is a group of students that are not doing well, we come up with a plan to help them." (**Mary Trout, Teacher, October 2011**)

"We have goals to have excellence beyond just passing standardized tests. We have extremely high goals. It is almost understood that our students will work at a high level and we will prepare them for college." (**Holly Salmon, Teacher, October 2011**)

Table 7. Data Acquisition Matrix (continued).

Theme 1 - continued

Goals are derived from data analysis driven from staff in collaboration with administration.

Document Data to Support Theme 1

Multi ear student enrollment data.

Funding projections based on student enrollment data.

Application information for free and reduced lunch.

These documents provide part of the funding foundation in the district that will support goal setting decisions in the district.

Theme 2

Student achievement has increased due to hiring and maintaining good teachers and moving out weak teachers. These teachers are of high caliber who works well together, exhibits pride, high expectations and compassion for the student body.

"I think we have been able to continue to put the right people on the bus. Some teachers were not willing to adapt to some of the changes that we have been making so rather than saboteurs or blockers; they simply left. So we take seriously the fit of our teachers within this community. Not only the teachers, but also our classified staff and our coaches; we want the best adults working with our kids. And we have had the luxury to embrace that philosophy. We have been able to have that exceptional teacher in our school. Staffing is key." (**John Antelope, Superintendent, October 2011)**

Table 7. Data Acquisition Matrix (continued).

Theme 2 - continued

Student achievement has increased due to hiring and maintaining good teachers and moving out weak teachers. These teachers are of high caliber who works well together, exhibits pride, high expectations and compassion for the student body.

"We have a lot of teachers that have been around for a long time and they are invested in high student achievement. There could be something said to the fact of continuity of staff and the superintendent playing a role in that." (**Bob Elkhorn, Principal, October 2011)**

"The teaching staff is high caliber and has good longevity in the district. I have been impressed with the amount of teachers that have worked in the district for 10 or more years. I think holding on to good quality teachers for a certain time is a good thing." (**Jerry Duckworth, Board Member, October 2011)**

"We have a lot of teachers that have been around for a long time and they are invested in high student achievement. We have a pretty steady employment base so not only do we have a lot of teachers that stay, but we also have a lot of families that stay." (**Brenda Bruin Board, Member, October 2011)**

"I feel that this school could go south really fast if the teachers decided they didn't want to work very hard." (**Helen Hide, Teacher, October 2011)**

"Hiring is very important." (**Donald Bearclaw, Teacher, October 2011)**

"I think (it is important) if you have a motivated staff who works well together." **(Mary Trout, Teacher, October 2011)**

Table 7. Data Acquisition Matrix (continued).

Theme 2 - continued

Student achievement has increased due to hiring and maintaining good teachers and moving out weak teachers. These teachers are of high caliber who works well together, exhibits pride, high expectations and compassion for the student body.

"Consistency and longevity of staff is huge. Even a school our size the superintendent is not in the classroom. But the fact that he (the superintendent) has picked the right faculty and kept them here is important; and believing teachers when they say we need to do this." (**Kristie Moosehead, October 2011**)

"Our staff does not have a lot of turnover. We work really well together." (**Holly Salmon, October 2011**)

"One of the big reasons (for our success) is that the staff remains very stable here. The CRT (Criterion Referenced Test) scores are always brought up as a sense of pride." **(Jenny Bighorn, October 2011**)

Document Data to Support Theme 2

Notice to parents regarding information that they might request regarding their child's classroom.

Table 7. Data Acquisition Matrix (continued).

Theme 3
Student Achievement has increased due to the Response to Intervention Program
"We have been part of the Response to Intervention program (RTI). We were one of the 3 schools in Montana that were chosen to take part in the pilot program of RTI. We have had great success. The data shows that this program is positively affecting the students by getting them equipped with the skills they need. We are continuing to embrace that." **(John Antelope, Superintendent, October 2011)**
"The biggest reason (for growth in achievement) is the implementation of RTI. This was implemented top down." **(Bob Elkhorn, Principal, October 2011)**
"Another benefit is our RTI program. I really think the RTI program throughout the elementary school has had a big impact on our school improvement." **(Jerry Duckworth, Board Member, October 2011)**
"One thing I would be curious about is the implementation of our RTI program. I would have to think that has be a factor." **(Brenda Bruin, Board Member, October 2011)**
"Part of that (student achievement) is the RTI program. That is huge." **(Kristie Moosehead, October 2011).**
"The RTI has been a big part of our elementary school. I think the RTI effectively identifies anyone who is struggling and fills in holes and provides extra instruction." **(Jenny Bighorn, Teacher, October 2011)**

Table 7. Data Acquisition Matrix (continued).

Theme 4

Superintendent Longevity has influenced student achievement through good leadership, support for professional development, financial support and support of ideas through his role as instructional leader.

"It is the support of the teachers which results in support of the students; financially and innovation that makes sense to me; to be able to match the strengths of teachers so see how it is going to affect students in the most positive. When I see a program that is innovative and helps students, I am a huge advocate. Professional development has been a large factor for teachers and classified staff. We also have matched up teachers with their professional development needs. When there is a compelling need, we have brought trainers in and on occasion have invited county wide schools in to help fill the slots."

(**John Antelope Superintendent October 2011**)

"Some of programs, particularly youth and government and model UN (United Nations) , are programs he (the superintendent) has supported and considers them as part of the schools gifted and talented offerings. With technology, the superintendent has been very supportive of ideas. I think the direct link is that you support your teachers, you support your administrators, you support the people in the school, you provide the important resources. I think longevity plays a role." (**Bob Elkhorn Principal October 2011**)

Table 7. Data Acquisition Matrix (continued).

Theme 4 - continued

Superintendent Longevity has influenced student achievement through good leadership, support for professional development, financial support and support of ideas through his role as instructional leader.

"Having great leadership from the superintendent standpoint and the principal standpoint definitely helps a lot. Great leadership helps out a lot. He (the superintendent) definitely has the instructional background so I think he can discuss with teachers and with parents as to how curriculum works. He (the superintendent) understands the budget well and also helps the board in understanding different ways we could go with the budget to support different programs. I am fairly certain that the teaching staff knows that he supports them so having that support and going back to supplies or professional development." (**Jerry Duckworth Board Member October 2011)**

 "His main role has been support of teachers and that is huge." (**Kristie Moosehead, Teacher, October 2011**)

"I think he supports academics; he supports academics over sports. When decisions are made they are made with the idea that academics come first. He has always supported academic extracurricular such as speech and debate. I think he sees that academics come first." (**Holly Salmon, Teacher, October 2011**)

Table 7. Data Acquisition Matrix (continued).

Theme 4 - continued
Superintendent Longevity has influenced student achievement through good leadership, support for professional development, financial support and support of ideas through his role as instructional leader.

"Administration has been very supportive of teachers going to conferences. You never really have felt that you would be told no. You push to find new things because you knew it was pretty likely that you could implement that. If you have the same superintendent, it is likely that you would have the same staff. And with the same staff, you are able to create consistency. (**Helen Hide, Teacher, October 2011).**

"If we need training, if we need an extra person, and budgeting that we are given support. He (the superintendent) has always been supportive with training, extra manpower and with interventions. We are fortunate we have financial means that other districts don't have. We are rarely turned down (for requests). But he is lucky he (the superintendent) has the group of people he has." (**Mary Trout, Teacher, October 2011**)

"Administration has always been very generous in bringing in extra resources. As a teacher I have never been told that I can't have resources and staff to enhance the program. The question (from the superintendent) always comes; do you have enough help, do you have enough help, let me know if you do not have enough help? And I'm not getting special treatment for that, everyone is getting that. The superintendent is very generous in his giving of financial funds for giving of things. I think that links very directly to student achievement. It encourages teachers to try new things and bring things into their curriculum." (**Jenny Bighorn, Teacher, October 2011**)

Table 7. Data Acquisition Matrix (continued).

Theme 4 - continued
Superintendent Longevity has influenced student achievement through good leadership, support for professional development, financial support and support of ideas through his role as instructional leader.

"He (the superintendent) certainly makes efforts to get out of the district to be involved in trainings such as the school boards association and other opportunities at a high level in the state; getting information on new trends in the state and trying to pass that off to staff There has to be something said about the consistency factor." (**Brenda Bruin, Board Member, October 2011**)

Theme 5
The conditions within the community that promote the superintendents longevity are the fact that it is a good community to raise a family, the superintendent likes the school and the school board has supported the superintendent through an extended contract.

"This is a great community to raise kids. Everybody's mind set is to work, to challenge the students towards greater ideals. It is a huge factor. I think it is the best education my kids can receive not only in Montana, but perhaps in the nation. The board; they gave me a 2 year contact right off. They have been extremely supportive." (**John Antelope, Superintendent, October 2011**)

Table 7. Data Acquisition Matrix (continued).

Theme 5 - continued
The conditions within the community that promote the superintendents longevity are the fact that it is a good community to raise a family, the superintendent likes the school and the school board has supported the superintendent through an extended contract.
"He has had a very supportive board. It's a good place to hang on. His family has thrived in this community as well." (**Jerry Duckworth, Board Member, October 2011**)
"Board support has been a primary factor and one of the reasons he stayed. The contract provided stability by extension of the contract. (Employment) contract security has to factor in." (**Brenda Bruin, Board Member, October 2011**)
He has a large family so if you can make your school successful, your kids can obviously benefit from that. So why would you leave here. He had a very favorable board for a long time." (**Helen Hide, Teacher, October 2011**)
"He has a young family. It is a great school and the right size." (**Donald Bearclaw, Teacher, October 2011**)
"He has a great investment in the community. It is where he wants to raise his family. I think up to this point, things are running smoothly. And his kids are getting a good education." (**Mary Trout, Teachers, October 2011**)
"I think they are happy that the test scores are good and are pretty happy with the school." (**Kristie Moosehead, October 2011**)

Table 7. Data Acquisition Matrix (continued).

Theme 5 - continued
The conditions within the community that promote the superintendents longevity are the fact that it is a good community to raise a family, the superintendent likes the school and the school board has supported the superintendent through an extended contract.
"I think it's his family's connection, his kids are here and I think this is great place to work." (**Holly Salmon, October 2011**)
"I think he has 5 children in the district and he and his wife wanted to move back to the district. It is a great place to raise a family. It is a friendly school district and provides a great education; I think he likes the area." (**Jenny Bighorn, October 2011**)
Document Data to Support Theme 5
Data that supports transparent communication with parents such as student events, parent teacher conferences and other reminders. Communication regarding the No Child Left Behind Act. Information to parents regarding their child's teacher. Information to parents regarding enrollment trends and funding levels.

Table 7. Data Acquisition Matrix (continued).

Theme 5 - continued
The conditions within the community that promote the superintendents longevity are the fact that it is a good community to raise a family, the superintendent likes the school and the school board has supported the superintendent through an extended contract.

Observation Data to Support Theme 5
Observation data in which the superintendent interacted in a positive manner with teachers and students. Both groups are part of the community. Students talk to their parents about interactions with their superintendent. Teachers lead efforts to either support initiatives by the superintendent or not and may influence community members as to how to vote on an upcoming referendum.
Observation data in which the superintendent interacted with a board member in the office commons area.

Case 2 – The Open Prairie School District

Demographics

The Open Prairie School District is located in northeastern Montana. The area is known for its outstanding trout fishing. Despite its primary role as a hunting and fishing center, Open Prairie boasts three blocks of downtown businesses that are "brimming with Old West charm and thriving with art." according to the Open Prairie Chamber of

Commerce website. According to Superintendent Jerry Grassley, the community of

Open Prairie is diverse but also tight knit.

> This is the biggest little town you have ever been in. And you can go
> downtown and not know anybody. You can go out in the winter and not
> know most of the people. A lot of them don't have kids, they are just
> kind of here for the winter sports. Whatever they want to do, they ski,
> snowmobile, or hunt, that sort of thing. This community is supportive in
> every way. We have construction; that is the main demographic here. We
> have folks coming and going. Many families are here, but the father is
> working out of town in North Dakota. We have Wooded Spruce which is
> about 18 miles as the crow flies. There are tourists there, but they don't
> really come down here. Wooded Spruce is really what gives us our funds;
> because their taxables are so high. And that has been really untapped.
> Folks are there for a little bit. So we pay tuition for those kids up there (in
> Wooded Spruce) , but very seldom do they ever come down here.
> (Superintendent Jerry Grassley, October 2011)

According to Superintendent Grassley, the community has two very active groups, the

lions club and the women's club, and the community as a whole has been very supportive

over the years. The community also has forest service offices and a mine.

> We have a forest service here; we have a mine out of town and they help
> with the economic side of it as well. We have run levies and never lost
> one until this last one. It has been great. This year it didn't pass."
> (Superintendent Jerry Grassley October 2011)

There are 333 students in school K-12. The free and reduced population hovers

around 40%. There are 31 teachers and 75 employees. There are 5 board members and

the school board chairman has been on board for 18 years.

Reflections by the Researcher

The superintendent of the Open Prairie School District was open and willing to be

part of the study. Even though a letter had been sent for distribution to teachers and

school board, there was not a sense that the superintendent has prepped staff for the

onsite portion of this study. The superintendent was helpful in providing lists of teachers for interview and he made contact with school board members. While in the teacher's lounge, the researcher introduced himself and talked about the study to a few teachers. Again, as with the Buffalo district, the researcher felt that being onsite was a bit intrusive to the staff and wondered if it was because the study was about how the superintendent influenced achievement and that this was, again, not a topic that was on the minds of staff.

Participants in the Open Prairie School District

During the onsite data collection phase, interviews with the superintendent, principals teachers and board members were conducted. To be eligible for interview as a teacher, the teacher needed to have taught in the district for at least 8 years. The rationale for this criteria was that teachers that were interviewed would have been in the district for at least as long as the superintendent. To be eligible for interview as a board member, the board member needed to have served on the board at least one term (3 years). The rationale for this criteria was that board members with at least 3 years' experience should have a better knowledge base for what the superintendent does than a board member who is just starting their tenure on the board. In the Open Prairie School District, there were a total of 11 participants in the study. Participants included the superintendent, two principals, 3 trustees and 5 teachers. Based on this criteria, interviewee's represented 100% of administration, 75 % of eligible trustees, and 50% of eligible teachers. Table 8 provides the interviewee's pseudo names and years of service in the school district.

Table 8. Participants in the Open Prairie School District.

Superintendent Jerry Grassley	18th year in school district
Principal John Steam	10th year in school district (10th as principal)
Principal Paul Rolling	21st year in school district (4th as principal)
Trustee Ron River	9th year on school board
Trustee Harry Deerman	5th year on school board
Trustee Daniel Badger	17th year on school board
Teacher Ross Vista	12th year in school district
Teacher Jeremy Sunset	8th year in school district
Teacher Betty Morningdove	34th year in school district
Teacher Mary Brook	8th year in school district
Teacher Beth Pony	14th year in school district
Percentage of Eligible Administration Interviewed	100%
Percentage of Eligible Trustees Interviewed	75%
Percentage of Eligible Teachers Interviewed	50%

The Development of Themes

The purpose of this study was to analyze how superintendents with more than average longevity in one school district have influenced student achievement by providing a context through programs, relationships and culture that supports and enhances student achievement in their school. The other purpose was to determine how local conditions or characteristics of the community influence the longevity of the

superintendent. In order to obtain this data, the next step in this process is the
identification of themes in this study.

In order to analyze the data in this study, both a holistic and embedded analysis
was utilized (Yin 2009). From the holistic view, the analysis was centered on the
superintendent's life in the school district and how and why they were able to stay in one
school district for multiple years. From the embedded view, the study analyzed specific
traits and practices of the superintendent in relation to student achievement.

Major Themes within the Open Prairie School District

In the Open Prairie School District, 5 themes emerged from the data. What
follows is an analysis of each theme through the eyes of the teachers, administration and
school board in the Open Prairie School District.

Theme 1

District wide goals are set by the superintendent who presents goals to the school
board and once adopted are universally supported in the district and at the building level.

Superintendent Interview

In the Open Prairie school district, goal setting is done in a different manner than
the Buffalo school district. Goals are generated at the district level by the superintendent
and at the building level through data analysis to reveal areas of weakness in student
performance. District goals are established every year and evaluated whether or not they
have been achieved.

> I usually set the goals and then present them to the board. If the board has any issues with the goals, we discuss and modify. The school board has been great in supporting them. Teachers support them. They fought them initially. They didn't like the superintendent setting the "doctrine," for instance. And they resisted it big time. But once we got our curriculum sorted out and put our educational consortium together, it has helped. (Jerry Grassley, Superintendent, October 2011)

According to Superintendent Grassley, this has done two things; the teachers learn how to write curriculum and they are able to form cohorts with other teachers. He also speaks about looking forward with goals. "I don't look at this year. I have always looked ahead. I am trying to look at what is best for 5 years from now" (Jerry Grassley Superintendent October 2011).

Principal Interviews

As an extension of district goals, according to principal Paul Rolling, principal goals are based on data analysis.

> We bounce our ideas off of him (the superintendent), and he has his own ideas. (Once goals are set) they are generally supported by the superintendent, school board and teaching staff. Instructional goals are based off of our CRT/AYP study that is done. We look for areas of weakness and set our goals from there. (Paul Rolling, Principal, October 2011)

According to Principal Stream, goals are established through the school board on an annual basis.

> We set building goals with staff. District goals are a shared deal. The principals sit down with staff and look at CRT (Criterion Referenced Test) data, RTI (Response to Intervention) data and we have our own charting process; We use this data to guide instruction. (At the) last meeting we went through CRT data with the board. We talk about some discrepancies in the data. With our size, we can sometimes see a huge swing. Math is statewide behind reading. We have really focused on math. (John Stream, Principal, October 2011)

Board Member Interviews

According to board member Ron River, the superintendent is instrumental in the

goal setting process as well as setting the action items. "Once they (goals) are set, they

are generally supported. I'm not sure how far down they go. I know that the

superintendent and principals are very involved and supportive" (Ron River, Board

Member, October 2011). According to board member Harry Deerman, the

superintendent is very involved in goal setting.

> Basically, from year to year, the superintendent brings goals and ensures
> that we are looking at them and reviewing them. It is a work in progress.
> He highlights what he thinks is going to benefit the school the most and
> what he thinks we should focus on. So his input is just as valid as ours at
> that point. Annually we get CRT reports, we have SAT/ACT feedback.
> We get feedback on the math programs. Almost every meeting we have
> feedback on some sort of data. (Harry Deerman, Board Member, October
> 2011)

> Superintendent Grassley serves as the historian for the board as far as
> goals as well. He keeps track of goals for the board; as to where they have
> been in the past and what the board could expect if they keep on the same
> course (Daniel Badger, Board Member, October 2011).

Teacher Interviews

From the teaching perspective, principals and staff work on both individual and

team goals. They are typically in relation to tests and performance, through a CRT

(Criterion Referenced Test) committee that looks at data and tries to look at strengths and

weak points.

> Our main goal is to meet our benchmarks; the state criteria for AYP. If
> the school board and he (the superintendent) have certain goals or are
> looking to go down a different direction, he comes to you. If it is in an
> individual program, he says we are lacking here. We need to change
> directions and we need to pick it up. I think he is very good at using his

principals. The superintendent is the boss. He is the guy at the top. I think anything in a working relationship comes back to the man at the top. So if you are successful that is where the success comes from and that also comes from hiring good people. (Jeremy Sunset, Teacher, October 2011)

Teacher Beth Morning Dove explains how the superintendent delivers goals to the staff.

At the beginning of the year, he always speaks to us as a staff on the goals. Here is where we are starting. We need to have enthusiasm; these are our points of interest this year. He always makes a point of talking to me; what are you doing in your classes, are you moving on here." (Betty Morning Dove, Teacher, October 2011)

Teacher Mary Brook mentioned that one of the main goals for the school district has been to improve facilities. "We are working on a goal to build a new school to make our learning environment better, which it will. Our old school had old classrooms and not enough classrooms. Facilities make a difference" (Mary Brook, Teacher, October 2011).

Finally according to Beth Pony, a supportive administration makes a difference.

We have a great administration that way. They want us to be very involved. We are all very good about listening back and forth. We want the academic rigor; anything to enhance academic achievement. Our main goal (is that) we want most of our kids to go on to college and be successful in college. (Beth Pony Teacher October 2011)

Theme 2

Student Achievement has increased due to autonomy and support given to principals from the superintendent and teachers working together to promote achievement.

Superintendent Interview

Superintendent Grassley has a lot of confidence in the principals of the district.

He credits the principals with growth in student achievement, particularly at the

elementary level. There is also a sense in the district that teachers have a good working

relationship and this relationship promotes student achievement. Superintendent

Grassley also emphasizes relationships between himself, teachers and students.

> I think why it (student achievement) has increased is because the
> principals have put such a focus on it; especially at the elementary level.
> Another thing is to say good morning, you are doing a good job. I don't
> think it is any different than kids; you've got to be out and about; they (the
> teachers) have to know that you care about them. And if you establish that
> relationship, they (the teachers) will come in and talk to you about
> whatever. As far as our principals, I stay out of the way once they are
> trained. I ask them to give me a report. I don't change what they are
> doing, I just want to know what they are doing. (Jerry Grassley,
> Superintendent, October 2011)

Principal Interviews

When asked whether or not principals were given autonomy to do their jobs,

Principal Paul Rolling stated that he thinks so and that the principals need to work with

the superintendent and school board (Paul Rolling Principal October 2011). Principal

John Stream cites the importance of commitment as well as the fact that there has been

consistency in the superintendent's office so goals can be supported and principals are

given the autonomy to do their job.

> I think it is the commitment to getting better by everybody. It is very
> much supported by the superintendent. I think a critical piece to this is
> that we do not have a revolving door in the superintendent's office; with
> someone new coming in with new ideas; coming in changing the direction
> we are going. Our superintendent is very supportive to give us the leeway
> to sit down with our staff and come up with goals to address the

weaknesses that we have. If I come to our superintendent and say we need another teacher to help with a program, he has always been very supportive of that.   He is generally very supportive especially with technology and is always very supportive of gains.   And if we have a problem, his response is lets go fix it. (John Stream, Principal, October 2011)

Board Member Interviews

Both Board Members Badger and Deerman credit staff for the way they work together to solve academic challenges in the school. They credit staff with a willingness to try to change and adapt to new strategies if one way of teaching does not work. They (the staff) can recognize which students are falling behind and they along with the administration work to figure out what they can do (Harry Deerman Board Member October 2011).

Teacher Interviews

Teacher Sunset correlates the good working relationship of teachers to moving students forward academically. "Our staff members work together to improve instruction and focus on our tests; K -8 working together and 9-12 working together. And just this year, we have started to move 6 through 12 with meetings and our CRT committee will involve 6 – 12" (Jeremy Sunset, Teacher, October 2011).

Teacher Mary Brook agrees.

I think we have a very dedicated staff. We are all working together. We have a lot of programs that we work together in. Our reading program from K – 5th is the same program. There is consistency there. In the math program, from 3rd grade to the 6th grade is same program. We have teachers that are working hard; we are all trying to be consistent. We are all working towards the same goals as well as our administration

encouraging us to be involved in that as well. (Mary Brook, Teacher, October 2011)

Finally, teacher Beth Pony correlates teachers working together and a competent group of new hires to student gains.

> We have really been working on the academic side. I see with the new hires, they are trying to make sure we put in a rigorous academic program. It has been a complete environment change. We have also had a change in principals. Our current principal taught for many years before he took the principal job. (Beth Pony Teacher October 2011)

Theme 3

Superintendent longevity has influenced student achievement through the superintendent's involvement in hiring and maintaining good teachers and moving out weak teachers.

Superintendent Interview

As with the Buffalo school district, hiring is an important link to success in the Open Prairie district as well. Superintendent Grassley's goal is to hire the best person. Once they are hired, they monitor a teacher's progress and if there are problems, those issues are dealt with.

> We look in the classroom as to what is going on with the teacher. If we see a problem, we deal with it. It might take a while to understand how a teacher is trying to get information across, but we take the time to find out. I'll tell you this; I think our principals are a lot of it. We sit down and discuss things every week. Basically, when it comes right down to it, it is the hiring that you do that's important. When someone steps out of line, they know what is going to happen; everyone does. So we don't wait on them. But we don't carry it on; if you have a problem on an evaluation and you clean it up, we are not going to talk to you about it again. Folks start trusting you and now they are willing to come in and say "I'm having

issues, what do you think?" And that helps with students; it helps with parents. When we have problems with teachers, I will sit down with principals and if there is a plan of improvement, I write that up. If teachers clean the problem up, then that is done. We will put it in their file, but we are not messing with them unless the problem comes back. (Jerry Grassley, Superintendent, October 2011)

Principal Interviews

Principal Rolling stresses that putting teachers in areas where they can be

successful is also important.

I think the main reason (student achievement has increased) is putting teachers where they can be successful. So we hired 3 new math teachers to try to bring up our math program; putting people in places where they can be successful and in turn our kids are successful. We have quality people. He (the superintendent) recognized through our deficiencies in AYP and CRT data, that we needed to improve. So in order to improve, we needed to hire quality people and he is in on the hiring process. That is number 1. Hiring quality people. You can link him (the superintendent) to the hiring process. There is a direct correlation to hiring good people and the direction we want to go and what he (the superintendent) has done. (Paul Rolling Principal October 2011)

Board Member Interviews

This theme is also supported at the school board level.

He (the superintendent) has focused on trying to hire the proper personnel and give the goals the special attention that needs to happen as well as the funding. We hired 3 additional people to focus on the reading; one of which was doing the scoring off site from a distance. (Ron River, Board Member, October 2011)

When asked what link existed between superintendent longevity and student

achievement, Board Member Deerman felt that the link is in the hiring process.

I think there is absolutely a link. And I would say that link is who he recommends for us to hire. I honestly feel that way. You put together a team effort; I don't think any one entity has made it work, I think the

entire entity has made it work. If a cog falls off the wheel, the wheel is not going to quit spinning here. Everybody is involved with it. We are going to continue to make gains because it is being approached in different directions. If you look at the big picture, I think that is the big picture; having the proper staff with the background of the board constantly supporting; you have to have that supportive structure in place once you do get good help in place. If you don't you are not going to retain them so I think that is pretty important. (Harry Deerman, Board Member, October 2011)

Teacher Interviews

Teacher Jeremy Sunset speaks of the responsibility that the superintendent has in

hiring qualified people.

He knows who to talk to, he knows who is responsible for those gains for certain areas; he is responsible for the hiring of staff. So he is the most capable of hiring staff to improve those areas. If it is an area that we need improvement, the superintendent knows that and he can make adjustments in the staff. I believe he is responsible in the support of the principals. They bring the ideas to him on what they would like to do; I think they meet on a regular basis as to what they can do to improve this. The principals are more directly involved. (Jeremy Sunset Teacher October 2011)

According to Beth Morning Dove, the new teacher hires have added a spark to the staff

as new teachers have energy, a zest for life and a close connection to students. She also

speaks to the fact that teachers that have been in the district for a long time need to know

when it is time to move aside and retire.

You have all these young teachers coming in. It is good to hire that youth. They have energy. They have a zest for life. They have a closer connection with kids. I think you need to be very careful as a teacher to know when to get out. I think our administration tries to bring in young teachers that get along with each other but still can work with the upper end teachers. And I think that chemistry is very good in how you put a staff together. I think for him (the superintendent) to help in hiring good principals and teachers; it is important. You need a good chemistry between people. If you surround yourself with good people and those

people surround themselves with good people, it works its way down. So if things are getting better, in my mind it has to start at the top. (Betty Morning Dove, Teacher, October 2011)

Beth Pony has also seen improvement with the new hires. And this improvement relates to the academic process.

Since I got here, I have seen us building and building and building particularly with our new hires that come in. We have really been working on the academic side. I see with the new hires, they are trying to make sure we put in a rigorous academic program. He (the superintendent) is very involved in the hiring, very involved with administration, office staff and school board. He is very proactive. I feel that he has been very hands on. And there have been some questionable hires in my mind, but if they do get someone that is not going to work, they are not just going to keep them on just because they hired them. He listens and wants the district to be the best so if that teacher is not doing the best the first year, then changes are made. (Beth Pony, Teacher, October 2011)

Theme 4

Superintendent longevity has influenced student achievement by the superintendent's consistency, his support for professional development and the opportunity to carry out his vision for the school.

Superintendent Interviews

One of the areas that was critical to student achievement was the link to professional development of teachers. In the Open Prairie School district, consistency and time to carry out the superintendent's vision for the district was cited as important. According to Superintendent Grassley, consistency is at the core of who he is.

Consistency is the biggest thing and I never change. Consistency and caring. You have to care. You cannot be a phony. They (teachers) have

to know who you are. We encourage them (teachers) to go off to training during the summer and we pay for that. We sent 4 staff members recently who are working on advanced placement classes. One of the things we try to do is keep your help healthy. So we provide money to send them to the health club, or send them up above (in the school weight room) to work out. So you look out for staff first, once staff is there and comfortable, not threatened, then staff does great. (Jerry Grassley, Superintendent, October 2011)

Superintendent Grassley also speaks about his vision for the school and how he has been

able to realize that vision.

I think different. I don't look at this year. I have always looked out. I am trying to look at what's best for 5 years from now. They had no up to date board policy when I got here. They had no teacher books; they had no staff books; they had no control of their vaults; they had no control of their doors; everyone in town had keys. And that caused a big stir. I said that is not the way it is going to be. My thought on it was to improve the facility and make it someplace where folks are going to take care of it. So we spent a lot of time on facilities; we want them nice. (Jerry Grassley, Superintendent, October 2011)

Principal Interviews

The district works to budget for whatever new programs are needed. Training is a

big part of this process. Principal Paul Rolling explains how the process works.

As an example, we wanted to add more rigor to our curriculum. So we decided to add AP(Advanced Placement) classes. The first thing you do is you need to have teachers that want to teach AP classes; which we did. We sold that idea. Next thing we did was we needed to get them trained in this area. So we sent them all out, supported by the school board, supported by the superintendent, we sent them to a week's AP institute in June out in Seattle We had 5 teachers go. We got them all trained, all aligned, and all new texts for them. And this fall, we were ready to go. So there were no ifs ands or buts as to how we were going to do it. This was all lined out with the school board, teachers and administration. The superintendent is involved financially; finding the financial dollars to make the plan work; he assists in the planning process as to where he thinks we should go. He is pretty good about that. (Paul Rolling, Principal, October 2011)

Principal Stream describes consistency as the lack of a revolving door in the

superintendent's office.

> I think a critical piece to this is that we don't have a revolving door in the
> superintendent's office; where someone new coming in has new ideas,
> coming in changing the direction we are going. Our superintendent is
> very supportive to give us the leeway to sit down with our staff and come
> up with goals to address the weaknesses that we have. He gives us a lot of
> support (John Stream Principal October 2011).

Board Member Interviews

Board member Ron River expresses a similar sentiment when asked if the fact

that the superintendent had been in the district for a long time had contributed to

achievement gains.

> I believe it does. Because if we had to start over with a new
> superintendent every two or three years, basically it is a reeducation of
> that person every cycle. It takes them a year just to get them up to speed
> with what we are trying to accomplish. If it wasn't for our superintendent
> and his foresight and dedication, we would be a lot further behind from
> where we stand right now. (Ron River, Board Member, October 2011)

Board member Deerman describes the process of resource alignment when asked whether

or not the district aligns resources to improvement efforts. "We always do. I would have

to say that we are more supportive than most. We just got done sending 5 teachers for

AP (Advanced Placement) classes. They went out and received training in AP so we

have 5 AP classes being taught here" (Harry Deerman Board Member October 2011). As

far as the superintendent being an instructional leader, Board Member Badger expresses

it in the following manner.

> I see him as the person who makes sure the options are open for the
> teachers and administrators to follow these links to be a better
> administrator or teacher. That way I would say yes. Because of the

forethought of funding, our teachers are allowed to go to different seminars to explore new opportunities in education. (Daniel Badger, Board Member, October 2011)

Teacher Interviews

Teacher Ross Vista cited the importance of the superintendent's vision. "The superintendent is the leader of the school no matter whether he is a financial guy, or a person guy. They are the head of the school. And as their vision goes, so goes the school" (Ross Vista Teacher October 2011). When asked what the link was between superintendent longevity and student achievement, Teacher Sunset felt that it is due to his knowledge base and working relationship with principals.

> I think there is a link there. I think it mainly comes from his experience in the district, his knowledge of the personnel, his knowledge of the current administrators, and his working relationship with them. I think it is easier, for example, if principals are struggling in an area for the superintendent to have the knowledge of the staff and to say how to improve this. He knows who to talk to, he knows who is responsible for those gains for certain areas. (Jeremy Sunset, Teacher, October 2011)

Teacher Betty Morning Dove spoke about how training is made available through the principals.

> We are encouraged to get out and go to workshops. The principal has given me several things; you need to hit these areas; you need to get out there and go to workshops. I am always getting little notes in my mailbox about workshops about ways to move on and to improve your area. (Betty Morning Dove, Teacher, October 2011)

Teacher Mary Brook reinforces the idea of consistency.

> I would say longevity influences student achievement if you are a positive person and you are working on the right goals. There is consistency. I think consistency makes students achieve because they are hearing it day after day; you are seeing the same thing at a higher level as you get older, I think consistency is a big thing. (Mary Brook, Teacher, October 2011)

Teacher Beth Pony speaks also of the superintendent's consistency and goals in linking

his longevity to student achievement.

> I would think just in consistency. The more consistency you have; especially with superintendents; they are the head of the school. They are the ones that oversee everything. I would say that him being an ambitious goal oriented person and then being here to see them through is important. In my opinion I see it does help. Also with consistency in the principal, I think it helps a lot. I don't mind change. But I don't want things changing right now because I like what is going on. (Beth Pony, Teacher, October 2011)

<div align="center">Theme 5</div>

The conditions within the community that promote the superintendent's longevity

are a financially sound, supportive community and school board that bought in to the

superintendent's vision.

Superintendent Interview

The final theme from the Open Prairie School District dealt with the 2nd question

in this study; how local conditions or characteristics of the community influence the

longevity of the superintendent. Superintendent Grassley has been in Open Prairie for 18

years. Unlike Superintendent Antelope in the Buffalo School district, Mr. Grassley's

children are grown. His wife works at the local hospital and he has served on a number

of community boards within the community. He has also been an advocate of the school

being the center of the community. He has advocated opening the school, free of charge

to community groups, the county commission, and other governmental agencies to use

the school as they need. This may have helped in the fact that the community has been

very generous and supportive in levy approval for many years. In fact, until last year, the

community has supported all mill levies for as long as anyone remembered. When asked

about the local conditions within the community that have promoted his longevity,

Superintendent Grassley responded as follows;

> It is the best community that we have lived in. Basically, I did not come
> here to just be in a school; I think your job is to make a school better when
> you are here. If it is not and you see that, it is time to go. You are taking
> the leadership; they know you are a leader. We open up our school to over
> 1200 activities a year. This is the community center. My wife has worked
> at the hospital so that is a good link. (My service on the) Health Board has
> really helped. We have a county wide board meeting where all the school
> boards come to meet. We started that when I first got here. We talk to
> legislators. We talk to commissioners. We have tried to engage the
> outlying school districts to see whatever issue they have; we would like to
> help. (Jerry Grassley, Superintendent, October 2011)

Principal Interviews

> Principal Paul Rolling speaks about Mr. Grassley's vision for the district.

> I think he had a vision of what he wanted in this school and his vision was
> to make this school the best school in Montana. He also had a building
> plan. I think he stayed long enough to see this building process through.
> Not only did he want the best educational process inside the building, he
> wanted the best structure in which to do it. So I think he had a plan in
> place to get this building built with little cost to our taxpayers. Not only
> do we have a great curriculum and a great staff going, but a brand new
> building as well. I think they (the community) bought into his vision also.
> We are going to get a new school; our school is getting better and better
> and I think they can see that. So they can see the improvement every year
> whether it be something physical or academically. This school has come a
> long way in 21 years as far as the curriculum goes and the physical plant.
> There have been some good changes in 21 years. (Paul Rolling, Principal,
> October 2011)

Principal John Stream agreed.

> He (the superintendent) has a vision and a goal for the district that he has
> worked for those 18 years. I think he has wanted to see the district
> improve. Eighteen years is a long time for a superintendent, and I think
> his PR (public relations) has been pretty good. He tries to do what is right
> for kids. There are two sides: the support you get, but you also have to
> want to stay. He has district support and staff support for the most part.
> (John Stream, Principal, October 2011)

Board Member Interviews

Focusing on the support for the school from the community, board member Ron

River stated that Superintendent Grassley has done a good job in developing a district

that is educating our kids. The proof is when students leave the high school and are

successful. He also credits the superintendent's foresight in budgeting for a new school at

very little cost to the taxpayers. This collection of funding took a great deal of time and

forethought.

> His foresight (was) in the budgeting process to be able to build a building
> without having to pass a bond issue. The engineering reports on our old
> buildings all reported that something had to be done. And he had the
> foresight to secure the funding. The support level of the schools has
> traditionally been very solid. He still has a strong following within the
> community. Even with some challenges over the last year, overall he still
> has the support within the community and he will be here until he is set to
> retire whenever that is. (Ron River, Board Member, October 2011)

When asked whether or not the local support for the school district has contributed to the

superintendent's longevity, board member Harry Deerman believes that it has. "Yes it has

definitely has something to do with it. If the community did not think the school was

doing a good job, they would not have given that support (Harry Deerman, Board

Member, October 2011).

According to Board Member Daniel Badger, the fact that the community has been

financially supportive and the district is fairly wealthy has also contributed to the

superintendent's longevity.

> It does not hurt to be from a wealthy district; (where you don't have to) fight and claw for every penny. And we have such unique eclectic community, not unlike many small towns in Montana. You have millionaires that are bumping elbows with "Joe Blow." We have a great brain trust here. They help and support you this way or that. It is not a bad place to live. It is a nice community. We have a brand new library, a brand new hospital, and a brand new school. (Daniel Badger, Board Member, October 2011)

Teacher Interviews

Teacher Ross Vista also agrees that Superintendent Grassley had a vision and a

plan to fulfill that vision. But it took a wealthy school district to bring the vision to

reality.

> I think he has had a vision. In order for that vision to play out, he has taken a look at the tax base and been able to use the real estate market that was hot. We have a brand new facility that is being built here without any bonding revenue because of his vision for 15 or 17 years. It was sound financial planning the way I see it. His actions will save this district millions of dollars. So that was sound financial planning. If I sit back and look at what he has done, and with that tax base, it has allowed him to finish his vision. If you can keep your eye on the prize, it will work even though you may rub some people the wrong way. (Ross Vista, Teacher, October 2011)

Teacher Jeremy Sunset cites community support that has contributed to Superintendent

Grassley's longevity.

> The community has been very supportive. For years and years and years, we have had unconditional support from the community. And that has been since he has been here so he has been a good leader that way. I think it has to do with the commitment to each other; the buy in. If you have a new superintendent come in for 2 years and then another superintendent comes in, I think it is difficult for that superintendent to get their agenda,

> their goals achieved. And then they leave, the staff is wondering what is the new person's goal for us. Obviously we want to have high achievement. I think all teachers want that. There are reasons superintendents leave and maybe it is just to move on; but as a staff, it is difficult when you have someone new and you have to adapt to their style. First of all, you have to get to know them (the superintendent). Trust doesn't come easily, so it takes a while for that. You have to buy into what they are "selling" and I think that if that changes every few years, the staff lacks that common focus. With our superintendent, we know where he is coming from. (Jeremy Sunset, Teacher, October 2011)

Teacher Mary Brooks agrees that the community is a great place to be. 'This community is a welcoming community. You get to know people. They are a supportive community; whether it is in academics or sports; they want kids to do well. The community itself is a nice place to be" (Mary Brook Teacher October 2011). Teacher Beth Pony sums up the community and its relationship to the school in the following manner;

> I think overall people see the big picture and look at the good things and that our school is building up. Our academics are strong. We have one of the nicest facilities around and it needed to be done, and he (the superintendent) found a way to do it. It was a need. That shows a lot. Our sports teams have been really supported by the booster club and I think he (the superintendent) has been a big part of that in getting businesses to support programs. I think he has been that man out there. Some people find him a bit unapproachable at times, but I think that is because they have not really tried. He is a busy man. If you look around and see what he has done, and just look at our staff; I think we have a wonderful staff and he is responsible for a lot of that. (Beth Pony, Teacher, October 2011)

Document Review

Document review was a part of this study. Documents that provided support to the research questions in this study were requested to be reviewed. The following documents were requested for review.

1. Demographic information about the community.

2. Demographic information about the school.

3. Minutes of school board meetings where district goals are discussed and adopted.

4. Minutes of administrative meetings where district goals are discussed.

5. Minutes of faculty meetings where district goals are discussed.

6. The district's 5 year educational improvement plan.

7. The district's school improvement plan for regional accreditation if applicable.

8. Samples of superintendent communication with the community.

9. Samples of superintendent communication with the school board.

10. Samples of superintendent communication with principals.

11. Samples of superintendent communication with teachers.

Superintendent Grassley provided the following documents for review; an aerial map of the Antelope community, the Comprehensive Educational Plan from 2009 – 2014 and district goal statements for the 2009 through the 2011 school year. The school goals supported theme 1 that goals are initiated by the Superintendent. The Comprehensive Education Plan included goals that span a 5 year period. These goals included improvement of math proficiency, improvement of reading proficiency and the integration of technology into all curriculum and instruction. This document provided a foundation for school improvement efforts in the district and also brought the district in compliance with requirements established by the Montana Office of Public Instruction.

Observations

       Several hours over a two day period was spent gathering data and observing

Superintendent Grassley. During the first day of the onsite visit, Superintendent

Grassley, on a tour of the building, spent a great deal of time interacting with teachers

and students. He made a point of greeting each teacher he came in contact with and

asking them how their day was going. He stood in the hallway for a period of time and

talked to students about a variety of topics from how the game was last night to how they

were doing in a particular class. Both students and teachers appeared to be accustomed to

this interaction and seemed to appreciate Superintendent Grassley's attention. In all

interactions Superintendent Grassley was pleasant and intent on listening to what

individuals had to say. Research question 1 asks how does superintendent longevity

provide a context through programs, relationships and culture that supports and enhances

student achievement? This mode of communication certainly contributes to the

relationships and culture of the school by creating a positive and open relationship with

the superintendent.

Data Acquisition Matrix

       Table 9 contains a data acquisition matrix for the Open Prairie School District.

This matrix has been developed to provide important information and validation of the

themes. Each theme is listed in the first column and followed by supporting data in the

form of quotes.

Table 9. Data Acquisition Matrix.

Theme 1

District wide goals are set by the superintendent who presents goals to the school board and once adopted are universally supported in the district.

"I usually set the goals and then present them to the board The school board has been great in supporting them. Teachers support them." **(Jerry Grassley, Superintendent, October 2011)**

"We bounce our ideas off of him, and he has his own ideas. (Once goals are set) they are generally supported by the superintendent, school board and teaching staff. Instructional goals based off of our CRT/AYP study that is done. We look for areas of weakness and set our goals from there." **(Paul Rolling, Principal, October 2011)**

"We set building goals with staff. The principals sit down with staff and look at CRT (Criterion Referenced Test) data, RTI (Response to Intervention) data and we have our own charting process." **(John Stream, Principal, October 2011)**

"Once they (goals) are set, they are generally supported." **(Ron River, Board Member, October 2011)**

"Basically from year to year, the superintendent brings goals and ensures that we are looking at them and reviewing them**." (Harry Deerman, Board Member, October 2011)**

Table 9. Data Acquisition Matrix (continued).

Theme 1 - continued

District wide goals are set by the superintendent who presents goals to the school board and once adopted are universally supported in the district.

"Our main goal is to meet our benchmarks; the state criteria for AYP. If the school board and he (the superintendent) have certain goals or are looking to go down a different direction, he comes to you. If it is in an individual program, he says we are lacking here. We need to change directions and we need to pick it up. I think he is very good at using his principals." **(Jeremy Sunset, Teacher, October 2011)**

Document Data to Support Theme 1

The Comprehensive Educational Plan. School goals in this plan support the fact that goals are initiated by the superintendent and include goals for a 5 year period. Goals include improvement in math, reading and the integration of technology into all curriculum and instruction.

Theme 2

Student Achievement has increased due to autonomy and support given to principals from the superintendent and teachers working together promote achievement.

"I think why it has increased is because the principals have put such a focus on it; especially at the elementary level. As far as our principals I stay out of the way; once they are trained. I ask them to give me a report. I don't change what they are doing, I just want to know what they are doing." **(Jerry Grassley, Superintendent, October 2011)**

Table 9. Data Acquisition Matrix (continued).

Theme 2 - continued

Student Achievement has increased due to autonomy and support given to principals from the superintendent and teachers working together promote achievement.

"I think it is the commitment to getting better by everybody. It is very much supported by the superintendent. Our superintendent is very supportive to give us the leeway to sit down with our staff and come up with goals to address the weaknesses that we have. And if we have a problem, his response is let's go fix it." **(John Stream, Principal, October 2011)**

"We have a wonderful staff who is willing to try to change and adapt new strategies if one way of teaching doesn't work." **(Daniel Badger Board Member. October 2011)**

"I would say it has a lot to do with the staff. They are obviously the front line. They can recognize with students are falling behind and they along with our administration work to figure out what they can do**." (Harry Deerman, Board Member, October 2011)**

" Our staff members work together to improve instruction and focus on our tests; K -8 working together and 9-12 working together." **(Jeremy Sunset, Teacher, October 2011)**

Table 9. Data Acquisition Matrix (continued).

Theme 2 - continued

Student Achievement has increased due to autonomy and support given to principals from the superintendent and teachers working together promote achievement.

"I think we have a very dedicated staff. We are all working together. We have a lot of programs that we work together in. Our reading program from K – 5th is the same program. There is consistency there. In the math program, from 3rd grade to the 6th grade is same program. We have teachers that are working hard; we are all trying to be consistent. We are all working towards the same goals as well as our administration encouraging us to be involved in that as well." **(Mary Brook, Teacher, October 2011)**

"We have really been working on the academic side." **(Beth Pony, Teacher, October 2011)**

Theme 3

Superintendent Longevity has influenced student achievement through the superintendent's involvement in hiring and maintaining good teachers and moving out weak teachers.

"Basically, when it comes right down to it, it is the hiring that you do that's important. When someone steps out of line, they know what is going to happen; everyone does. When we have problem with teachers, I will sit down with principals and if there is a plan of improvement, I write that up. If teachers clean the problem up, then that is done. We will it in their file, but we are not messing with them unless the problem comes back." **(Jerry Grassley Superintendent October 2011)**

Table 9. Data Acquisition Matrix (continued).

Theme 3 - continued
Superintendent Longevity has influenced student achievement through the superintendent's involvement in hiring and maintaining good teachers and moving out weak teachers.

"He (the superintendent) recognized through our deficiencies in AYP and CRT data, that we needed to improve. So in order to improve, we needed to hire quality people and he is in on the hiring process. That is number 1. Hiring quality people. You can link him (the superintendent) to the hiring process, to the ideas of this is what we should do to make these programs better. There is a direct correlation to hiring good people and the direction we want to go and what he (the superintendent) has done." **(Paul Rolling, Principal, October 2011)**

"He (the superintendent) has focused on trying to hire the proper personnel and give the goals the special attention that needs to happen as well as the funding." **(Ron River, Board Member, October 2011)**

"I would say that link is who he recommends for us to hire. I honestly feel that way. You put together a team effort; I don't think any one entity has made it work, I think the entire entity has made it work. If cog falls off the wheel, the wheel is not going to quit spinning here. Everybody is involved with it. We are going to continue to make gains because it is being approached in different directions. If you look at the big picture, I think that is the big picture; having the proper staff with the background of the board constantly supporting; you have to have that supportive structure in place once you do get good help in place. If you don't you are not going to retain them so I think that is pretty important." **(Harry Deerman, Board Member, October 2011)**

Table 9. Data Acquisition Matrix (continued).

Theme 3 - continued
Superintendent Longevity has influenced student achievement through the superintendent's involvement in hiring and maintaining good teachers and moving out weak teachers.
"So he is the most capable of hiring staff to improve those areas. If it is an area that we need improvement, that superintendent knows that and he can make adjustments in the staff." **(Jeremy Sunset, Teacher, October 2011)**
"I think for him (the superintendent) to help in hiring good principals and teachers; it is important. You need a good chemistry between people. If you surround yourself with good people and those people surround themselves with good people, it works its way down. So if things are getting better, in my mind it has to start at the top." **(Betty Morning Dove, Teacher, October 2011)**
"Since I got here, I have seen us building and building and building particularly with our new hires that come in. I see with the new hires, they are trying to make sure we put in a rigorous academic program. He (the superintendent) is very involved in the hiring, very involved with administration, office staff, and school board. He is very proactive. I feel that he has been very hands on. He listens, and wants the district to be the best so if that teacher is not doing the best the first year, then changes are made." **(Beth Pony, Teacher, October 2011)**

Table 9. Data Acquisition Matrix (continued).

Theme 4

Superintendent longevity has influenced student achievement by the superintendent's consistency, his support for professional development and the opportunity to carry out his vision for the school.

"Consistency is the biggest thing and I never change." Consistency and caring. You have to care. You can't be a phony. They have to know who you are. We encourage them (teachers) to go off to training during the summer and we pay for that. I think different. I don't look at this year. I have always looked out. I am trying to look at what's best for 5 years from now." **(Jerry Grassley, Superintendent, October 2011)**

"As an example, we wanted to add more rigor to our curriculum. So we decided to add AP classes. The first thing you do is you need to have teachers that want to teach AP classes; which we did. We sold that idea. Next thing we did was we needed to get them trained in this area. So we sent them all out, supported by the school board, supported by the superintendent, we sent them to a week' AP institute in June out in Seattle We had 5 teachers go, we got them all trained, all aligned, go all new texts for them. And this fall, we were ready to go the superintendent is involved financially; finding the financial dollars to make the plan work; he assists in the planning process as to where he thinks we should go. He is pretty good about that**." (Paul Rolling, Principal, October 2011)**

"Our superintendent is very supportive to give us the leeway to sit down with our staff and come up with goals to address the weaknesses that we have. He gives us a lot of support." **(John Stream, Principal October, 2011)**

Table 9. Data Acquisition Matrix (continued).

Theme 4 - continued

Superintendent longevity has influenced student achievement by the superintendent's consistency, his support for professional development and the opportunity to carry out his vision for the school.

"If it wasn't for our superintendent and his foresight and dedication, we would be a lot further behind from where we stand right now." **(Ron River, Board Member, October 2011)**

"I would have to say that we are more supportive than most. We just got done sending 5 teachers for AP (Advanced Placement) classes." **(Harry Deerman Board Member October 2011)**

"I see him as the person who makes sure the options are open for the teachers and administrators to follow these links to be a better administrator or teacher. Because of the forethought of funding, our teachers are allowed to go to different seminars to explore new opportunities in education." **(Daniel Badger, Board Member, October 2011)**

"The superintendent is the leader of the school no matter whether he is a financial guy, or a person guy. They are the head of the school. And as their vision goes, so goes the school." **(Ross Vista Teacher October 2011)**

"I think there is a link there. I think it mainly comes from his experience in the district, his knowledge of the personnel, his knowledge of the current administrators; the principals, and his working relationship with them. I think it is easier, for example if

Table 9. Data Acquisition Matrix (continued).

Theme 4 - continued

Superintendent longevity has influenced student achievement by the superintendent's consistency, his support for professional development and the opportunity to carry out his vision for the school.

principals are struggling in and area, for the superintendent to have the knowledge of the staff and to say how to improve this. He knows who to talk to, he knows who is responsible for those gains for certain areas." **(Jeremy Sunset Teacher October 2011)**

We are encouraged to get out and go to workshops." **(Betty Morning Dove Teacher October 2011)**

"There is consistency. I think consistency makes students achieve because they are hearing it day after day; you are seeing the same thing at a higher level as you get older, I think consistency is a big thing." **(Mary Brook Teacher October 2011)**

"I would think just in consistency. The more consistency you have; especially with superintendents, they are the head of the school. They are the ones that oversee everything. I would say that him being an ambitious goal oriented person and then being here to see them through is important. In my opinion I see it does help. I don't mind change. But I don't want things changing right now because I like what is going on; but it can be." **(Beth Pony Teacher October 2011).**

Table 9. Data Acquisition Matrix (continued).

Theme 5

The conditions within the community that promote the superintendents longevity

are a financially sound, supportive community that bought in to the

superintendent's vision.

" It is the best community that we've lived in." **(Jerry Grassley, Superintendent,**

October 2011)

"I think he had a vision of what he wanted in this school and his vision was to make this

school the best school in Montana. I think they (the community) bought into his vision

also." **(Paul Rolling, Principal, October 2011)**

"He has a vision and a goal for the district that he has worked for those 18 years. I think

he has wanted to see the district improve. There are two sides, the support you get, but

you also have to want to stay. He has district support and staff support for the most part."

(John Stream, Principal, October 2011)

"His foresight in the budgeting process to be able to build a building without having to

pass a bond issue. The engineering reports on our old buildings all reported that

something had to be done. And he had the foresight to secure the funding. The support

level of the schools has traditionally been very solid. He still has a strong following

within the community." **(Ron River, Board Member, October 2011)**

"If the community did not think the school was doing a good job, they would not have

given that support." **(Harry Deerman, Board Member, October 2011)**

Table 9. Data Acquisition Matrix (continued).

Theme 5 - continued

The conditions within the community that promote the superintendents longevity are a financially sound, supportive community that bought in to the superintendent's vision.

"It does not hurt to be from a wealthy district; (where you don't have to) fight and claw for every penny. They help and support you this way or that. It is not a bad place to live. It is a nice community. We have a brand new library, a brand new hospital, and a brand new school." **(Daniel Badger, Board Member, October 2011)**

"I think he has had a vision. In order for that vision to play out, he has taken a look at the tax base and been able to use the real estate market that was as hot. He might have thought I can do things here. I will have the money to follow the vision that I have. We have a brand new brand new facility that is being built here without any bonding revenue because of his vision for 15 or 17 years. It was sound financial planning the way I see it. His actions will save this district millions of dollars. So that was sound financial planning. If I sit back and look at what he has done, and with that tax base, it has allowed him to finish his vision. If you can keep your eye on the prize, it will work even though you may rub some people the wrong way." **(Ross Vista, Teacher, October 2011)**

"The community has been very supportive. For years and years and years, we have had unconditional support from the community. And that has been since he has been here so he has been a good leader that way." **(Jeremy Sunset, Teacher, October 2011)**

Table 9. Data Acquisition Matrix (continued).

Theme 5 - continued
The conditions within the community that promote the superintendents longevity are a financially sound, supportive community that bought in to the superintendent's vision.

"This community is a welcoming community. They are a supportive community; whether it is in academics or sports; they want kids to do well. The community itself is a nice place to be." **(Mary Brook, Teacher, October 2011)**

"I think overall people see the big picture and look at the good things, and that our school is building up. Our academics are strong. We have one of the nicest facilities around and it needed to be done and he found a way to do it. It was a need. That shows a lot. Our sports teams have been really supported by the booster club and I think he (the superintendent) has been a big part of that in getting businesses to support programs. I think he has been that man out there." **(Beth Pony, Teacher, October 2011)**

Observation Data to Support Theme 5

Observation data in which the superintendent interacted in a positive manner with teachers and students. Both groups are part of the community. Students talk to their parents about interactions with their superintendent. Teachers lead efforts to either support initiatives by the superintendent or not and may influence community members as to how to vote on an upcoming referendum.

Case 3 – The Alpine School District

Demographics

Alpine, Montana boarders the Alpine National Forest in south central Montana.

The area was founded by fur traders. The arrival of the railroad in the late 1800's

brought the first real activity to the area. As gold was found in the area, the town grew to

accommodate miners. The economy was also influenced by logging but that industry has

slowed in recent years. According to Superintendent Harry Timber, the community is

very unique and individualistic and is a true example of Montana because of the

restrictions of timber and the economy.

> When I got here it (the school district) was about 30% free and reduced
> lunch; everything was booming. We had a mill here with 175 workers.
> Over the last 19 years the mills have closed, the harvesting of timber has
> been taken away and we are now at 72% free and reduced hot lunch.
> (Harry Timber, Superintendent, October 2011)

Even though the community has a high poverty rate and high unemployment, it is an

attractive area for people to retire.

> You still have rich retirees coming in because it's beautiful. A unique
> quality of the community is that even though it is very right wing in
> political beliefs, the community still supports everyone's right to freedom.
> So they would support the liberal's right to freedom just as much as their
> own. (Harry Timber Superintendent October 2011)

The district has a high turnover rate at the high school level and has experienced a

loss of student enrollment over the last 15 years.

> We've lost 250 to 275 students which was one third of our enrollment
> since 1997. We have an almost 50% turnover rate of high school students
> that doesn't include the eighth graders coming up. We currently have 500
> students in school and 41 teachers. Alpine High School is represented by
> 17 different states as the district has several therapeutic programs where

students come into the wilderness school for six weeks. These kids have been expelled from every school in the country and their parents bring them here as a last resort. They place them here and pay around $5000 a month. Those kids end up in our school and through our programs; we get a 93 to 94% graduation rate. It's good because it puts our kids around kids who plan on going to college and are connected to very famous people. (Harry Timber, Superintendent, October 2011)

Reflections by the Researcher

In the Alpine District the superintendent was welcoming, seemed excited to be part of the study and had a high level of interest as to what the findings might be. By the time the researcher had arrived, several interviews had been arranged and there was an open and friendly feeling among staff. This was a different environment than I had experienced in the Buffalo and Open Prairie districts. The researcher did not detect apprehension to be involved in the study and it was evident that participants were proud of their school district and they worked hard to look for areas to improve. The researcher was also treated to stay at a guest house that was owned by a school board member. This invitation spoke volumes about the climate of the district and the willingness for those that were a part of the district to be helpful. This climate of helpfulness was consistent throughout the visit.

Participants in Alpine School District

During the onsite data collection phase, interviews with the superintendent, principals teachers and board members were conducted. To be eligible for interview as a teacher, the teacher needed to have taught in the district for at least 8 years. The rationale for this criteria was that teachers that were interviewed would have been in the district for

at least as long as the superintendent. To be eligible for interview as a board member, the board member needed to have served on the board at least one term (3 years). The rationale for this criteria was that board members with at least 3 years' experience should have a better knowledge base for what the superintendent does than a board member who is just starting their tenure on the board.

In the Alpine School District, there were a total of 15 participants in the study. Participants included the superintendent, 3 principals, 3 trustees and 8 teachers. Based on the criteria identified for this study, this represents 100% of administration, 75 % of eligible trustees, and 50% of eligible teachers. Table 10 provides the participants name and years of service in the school district.

Table 10. Participants in Alpine School District.

Superintendent Harry Timber	19th year in school district
Principal Harold Sunrise	19th year in school district
Principal Ned Ravine	29st year in school district
Principal Kristie Trail	9rd year in school district
Trustee Jenny Peak	12th year on school board
Trustee Jill Stream	19th year on school board
Trustee Daniel Snowshoe	7th year in school district
Teacher Mary Moss	26th year in school district
Teacher John Branch	29th year in school district
Teacher Helen Fox	27th year in school district
Teacher Tina Downhill	18th year in school district

Table 10. Participants in Alpine School District (continued).

Teacher Janice Hiker	20th year in school district
Teacher Rebecca Aspen	13th year in school district
Teacher Larry Pine	30th year in school district
Teacher Jerry Frost	11th year in school district
Percentage of Eligible Administration Interviewed	100%
Percentage of Eligible Trustees Interviewed	75%
Percentage of Eligible Teachers Interviewed	50%

The Development of Themes

        The purpose of this study was to analyze how superintendents with more than
average longevity in one school district have influenced student achievement by
providing a context through programs, relationships and culture that supports and
enhances student achievement in their school. The other purpose was to determine how
local conditions or characteristics of the community influence the longevity of the
superintendent. In order to discover this data, the next step in this process is the
identification of themes in this study.

        In order to analyze the data in this study, both a holistic and embedded analysis
was utilized (Yin 2009). From the holistic view, the analysis was centered on the
superintendents life in the school district and how and why they were able to stay in one
school district for multiple years. From the embedded view, the study analyzed specific
traits and practices of the superintendent in relation to student achievement.

Major Themes within the Alpine School District

In the Alpine School District, 5 themes emerged from the data. What follows is an analysis of each theme through the eyes of the teachers, administration and school board in the Alpine School District.

Theme 1

Goals are established in cooperation with teachers through the utilization of a district leadership team and are formally adopted and supported by the school board.

Superintendent Interview

Goals in the Alpine School District are developed in cooperation with staff and then to a formal adoption in the fall. Annual district goals are adopted yearly by the school board. Superintendent Harry Timber has established a district leadership team which includes staff members from all three buildings.

> We have a district leadership team that includes staff. We don't have the flexibility that we used to with the No Child Left Behind Act because the goals are pretty much set for us. Before that, you could vary a lot under the old school improvement model. I keep the school board members informed about goals. (Harry Timber, Superintendent, October 2011)

Principal Interviews

Once the goals are set, according to Superintendent Timber, the school board is supportive of those goals. Goals are adopted in August with the understanding that they can be changed in September. They are formally adopted at a board meeting every year and teachers tend to support the goals. School principal Harold Sunrise confirms this by

indicating that district goals are developed by a committee of teachers that work with the

superintendent to talk about what the goals are for that year.

> Goals many times start with issues that are happening in the district. They become a high priority or concern; typically academic issues. So it is not political issues that get into our goals. Because we are a small district, there is a third of your staff that is on the committee. You have a representative population. Teachers are pretty well involved here. (Harold Sunrise, Principal, October 2011)

This process is also cited by Principals Ravine and Trail.

> At the beginning of the year, the (the superintendent) talks about the goals and what he thinks are important. We have a district leadership team. They (leadership team) provide input on school related topics and meets maybe 3 times per year. The board is very supportive of goals. (Ned Ravine, Principal, October 2011)

Board Interviews

Board member Jenny Peak describes the goal setting process at the board level.

According to Jenny, it is important for the board to improve. Once goals are set, they

review them after implementation to see if they are effective.

> We go back and see if it is working. We discuss whatever is coming in. Setting littler goals actually add to the bigger goal of kids learning. By solving little goals it helps with the big goals of getting students to achieve. For certain goals, we had community forums. It isn't always the answers; sometimes it is just the questions that are important. (Jenny Peak, Board Member, October 2011)

Board member Jill Stream speaks of the guidance from the superintendent. "We take a

lot of guidance from the superintendent; where the important things are going along" (Jill

Stream, Board Member, October 2011). Board member Daniel Snowshoe gives an

example of how goals are utilized at the board level.

> Just like in any organization, goals are important in any individual's life. If we don't set something for ourselves, as an institution, you don't have a horizon or a picture to strive for; to motivate yourself and your staff. I think we are making progress with our mentoring program and the goals that we are trying to achieve with their academic program, in their testing and bringing their scores up. And that goes anywhere from academics, to facilities, to athletics. It is very well rounded. If you don't have a mindset and heart set towards goals, you might as well check yourself off at the next term. (Daniel Snowshoe, Board Member, October 2011)

Teacher Interviews

From teacher's standpoint, according to Mary Moss, teachers are also required to set goals.

> Every teacher is required to set individual goals. You have to meet with the principal. If you are on the educational leadership team you would have some input on goals. I am on the district leadership team. Principals are strong believers in goals for teachers, as well as the superintendent. It is always clearly defined as to what the district goals are going to be for that year. They always share what the goals are going to be. Once the goals are set they are supported by lot of people; the school board, principals and superintendent. They are supported by teaching staff. (Mary Moss, Teacher, October 2011)

Teacher Helen Fox gives Superintendent Timber credit for starting the goal setting process in the district.

> Since the superintendent has been here, we have spent a lot of time with vision and goal setting so everything is formalized. When the superintendent came, that is when a lot of it started. We are involved in everything. It is a small district. If you are in to doing things, you are on many committees in the district and leadership teams. I am involved in pretty much all of them. (Helen Fox, Teacher, October 2011)

According to teacher John Branch, the school board is consistent and supportive of the school. "The school board has goals and we have had good school boards down through the years; really consistent people that let the school run. They want to know what is

going on but do not micromanage" (John Branch, Teacher, October 2011). Teacher

Janice Hiker confirms that once goals are set, they are supported by teachers,

administration and school board members. The superintendent gains approval of the

goals by the school board, and the school board supports the superintendent. "He (the

superintendent) gets the goals approved by the school board, and the school board

supports them" (Janice Hiker, Teacher, October 2011). "The superintendent works on

the goals and brings them to the leadership team and we discuss them and then he takes

them to the board" (Kristie Trail, Principal, October 2011).

<u>Theme 2</u>

Student achievement gains are the result of efforts of the superintendent,

principals and veteran staff who analyze a wide variety of data.

<u>Principal Interviews</u>

In the Alpine School District, Superintendent Timber is credited with being a

central figure that is involved in all aspects of student achievement. He leads the effort in

analyzing data that will reveal problem areas that need to be focused on. The principals

and teachers seem to have a comfort level in the use of data and this seemed to be a key

link to improvement of student scores in the district.

> The superintendent is like a light house in taking a direct role in looking at the CRTs (Criterion Referenced Test) all the way to high school. For all the data looking that I do, he does just as much or more. He has a pretty intimate knowledge about that. I try to go that next step to look at individual kids. He will look at trends or patterns to see what we are doing right or doing wrong. So from a developmental aspect, he is a curricular specialist for the district. Someone has got to be and in our

district we don't have a curriculum specialist. So that means it would go back to each building level and we are not likely to be cohesive. We would look at the same data sets for our building not really worrying about what the other buildings are doing. As the superintendent, they (district data) are all his. He is pulling it together. He seems to find the time to do that. That is his expertise; on curriculum development and so he picked up that piece which then alleviates us having to do it. Because of his background expertise, he is able to do it and has found the time for that. He has made sure the dollars have been pooled together for professional development or there would not have been dollars to go with it. (Harold Sunrise, Principal, October 2011)

Teacher Interviews

According to Principal Kristie Trail, teachers use data to analyze problems and come up with innovative ideas for student improvement. "I watched some teachers try something really innovative and new last year. They really looked at the data. We saw a lot of growth. They are a very dedicated staff. It is just so evident that they care" (Kristie Trail, Principal, October 2011).

From a teacher's perspective, Mary Moss speaks to teacher awareness of data.

We are aware as a staff that our scores are pretty solid. I know my scores. We get scores online and analyze them ourselves. We look at every test release sight. I could tell you how the state scored and how other districts scored and how our grade level scored. We all do it because we want to see where the gaps are. What you see in a school district that is small, everyone really wants to do well; you want to know the scores. (Mary Moss, Teacher, October 2011)

According to teacher Helen Fox, she is personally involved in data analysis.

Individually I am involved in data analysis. I don't do a lot with CRTs because I am in a lower grade but we have had the opportunity to give CRTs. We have looked at a lot of the test questions. The superintendent has really pushed that; breaking down the test. (Helen Fox, Teacher, October 2011)

According to Teacher Tina Downhill, at the elementary level, research has been used to guide decision making.

> We use the research and that is one thing that the superintendent is always looking for; the educational research that backs up high achievement. So we try to apply it here; and we did with all day kindergarten and direct instruction. We increased math and science time. The superintendent is definitely involved in an instructional leadership role. (Tina Downhill, Teacher, October 2011)

<u>Theme 3</u>

Student achievement gains are enhanced by a strong and comprehensive professional development program that trains teachers in the use of a variety of researched base instructional strategies that enables a teacher to better engage students in a caring and respectful manner in order to obtain quality learning.

<u>Superintendent Interview</u>

As with the other districts in this study, the Alpine District uses professional development extensively to train teachers in programs that the superintendent believes will enhance student achievement. However, the Alpine District devotes several additional days for professional development. In Montana, the state allows school districts up to 7 PIR (Pupil Instruction Related) days in the funding formula. These days are generally used for the opening and closing of school as well as in-service training for teachers. In Alpine, according to Superintendent Timber, in addition to the 7 PIR days, they have added 6 professional development days. During these days, they have targeted specific programs such as Love and Logic and the Learning Cube. Once a specific

academic program is chosen, all teachers that will use the program are sent to training.

And the training is not limited to sites in Montana. The district has sent teachers to

wherever the training is and superintendent Timber attends the training as well.

> We have six teacher development days that we instigated at least eight years ago. That has been a catalyst in bringing us together. We have six times a year for professional development on top of the seven PIR days we have in the district. When the state changed the requirements to where the school week was calculated in minutes, we turned that into six days of professional development; now we have plenty of time for professional development. It is a big, big, big item. In this district, district funds and grant money are all spent on staff development. No one gets more staff development than our teachers. Because of this new law (No Child Left Behind), we needed to protect emotional needs of children and teachers. So we went big time into Love and Logic. I took the teachers and administrative team to Las Vegas. We had meetings with Jim Faye. We went to Love and Logic K-12. We had a parent training as well. We were looking at improving relationships between students and teachers; we then transitioned into Marzano. We went into instructional strategies to encourage higher-level thought processes. We brought in consultants and also would send 8 to12 people to workshops. We sent staff anywhere from Palm Springs to Park City. We also sent them to Las Vegas. We also brought in the concept of professional learning communities. We have allowed time for our teachers to talk with each other. We have focused on The Learning Cube this year.   The PLCs (Professional Learning Communities) have refocused into aligning curriculum with data. Now PLC's focus on how to concentrate on student data. I do not lock up grant money in the salaries like some districts do. I put it under staff development. (Harry Timber, Superintendent, October 2011)

Principal Interviews

According to principal Harold Sunrise, the district made a shift several years ago

where training became vertically geared to K – 12 training rather than building by

building.

> The first 5 years, professional development was up to me. When we became more K-12 oriented, we have been more academic towards district wide direction. We have taken the real lead from the district wide

committee, instead of deciding building wide within the last 10 years. (Harold Sunrise, Principal, October 2011)

Principals Ravine noted the importance of training and what it has meant to the school district.

> We are ahead of the state in a lot of areas because he (the superintendent) has always been ahead of the game. We were the first district as a nation to contract with Love and Logic. We had a 3 to 5 year contract with Love and Logic. (Ned Ravine, Principal, October 2011)

This is echoed by Principal Kristie Trail who said that when training is proposed, teachers are either given time, or are sent to get additional training. Summer stipends are also provided for teacher training.

> In our school, it (training) has changed our life. I know it has made a difference in teachers staying dedicated and basically thrilled with their job. It seems like when we get a goal and we put our mind to it, we are pretty successful at it. (Kristie Trail, Principal, October 2011)

Board Member Interviews

Board member Jenny Peak is pleased with the support the board has given teachers and believes it has significantly influenced student achievement.

> (Student achievement has been influenced) because of the program we put in place in the last few years; the policies, the changes we made in sending teachers off to training situations. The mentor program has been a big part of it. We have so many retired teachers and we wanted a mentorship program. We assign certain teachers to new teachers. They are working together to solve problem. (Jenny Peak, Board Member, October 2011)

Board member Daniel Snowshoe agrees.

> What we have been doing with staff development, it goes back to training; staff presents it to the board, we consider it. The time spent of researching a problem is significant. We might say, yea, we have this problem, but how are we going to tackle this problem and take care of it? You start

diving into the resources. The board is involved in this discussion. A lot of the legwork is brought to us. (Daniel Snowshoe, Board Member, October 2011)

Teacher Interviews

The value of professional development is also echoed by teachers such as John

Branch.

We have been doing a lot with the Learning Cube so the goals that we set are the things that are in front of us at the time. We have done a lot of stuff with Love and Logic through the years. We are doing some things with CRT improvement and Professional Learning Communities. That would fit into school improvement. (John Branch, Teacher, October 2011)

According to Helen Fox, the superintendent supports goals in the district by setting

guidelines for teachers to meet and giving them the time and resources to meet those

goals.

We have some of the very best in-service. I talk to other teachers I know. We have 6 extra days of in-service. We have big names that come into the district. When we have someone like that come in, and the superintendent provides that, it is hard not to grow. Huge support. I don't know of any other school district this size that has what we have. Everybody is involved in goals. (Helen Fox Teacher October 2011)

Teacher Rebecca Aspen sums this theme up by commenting about the child centered

focus of the school.

I do think our goal here is child centered. Work that we do, conferences we get sent to, presenters that the superintendent brings in all has to with the improvement of us as teachers as well as the students as learners. Everything revolves around this. It creates better dynamics with you and other teachers that you've never had the chance to know. Although the goals are top down, if there was something that I really wanted to go to that would support my teaching and the money was there, he would send

me. This process is supported by the school board because the board supports the superintendent 100%. (Rebecca Aspen, Teacher, October 2011)

Theme 4

Superintendent longevity has influenced student achievement through the hiring process, support for veteran teachers and resource alignment for professional development.

Superintendent Interview

As with the Buffalo and Open Prairie School Districts, hiring in the Alpine District is central to student achievement gains. By being in the district for 19 years, Superintendent Timber has been able to hire new staff that aligns with his vision as well as keep a veteran staff motivated to continue with quality teaching. According to Superintendent Timber, his longevity has allowed him to build support from the school board and in turn be involved in hiring teachers that he wants although he is not directly involved in the process.

> Longevity in my case has helped me gain student achievement because I'm cocky. I have a board that supports me, an administration that's good and basically teachers that I've hired indirectly even though I am never on a teacher interview team. I'm behind the scenes looking at applications so when you get that, you can be a risk taker. And if you're not a risk taker, I don't believe you can make positive changes. I do everything I can to hire a husband and wife team. I really stress the family approach. (Harry Timber, Superintendent, October 2011)

In addition to hiring, Superintendent Timber believes that providing resources for staff

development is also key to student achievement. He gets ideas for training not only from

keeping up to date on the latest literature, but he also listens to his teachers.

> We align resources by providing staff development that aligns with our
> goals. If you listen to teachers and treat them with respect, if you bring in
> people to provide staff development it really helps. The longevity has
> allowed me to have time to look at the big picture and improve staff
> development. I don't take credit for it. You have to have good people.
> Good people are here because of where they live, the way they are treated,
> the staff development that they receive and the perks that they get. If you
> couldn't have these things, it is going to catch up to you; whether its
> students, whether its teachers, whether its administrators; staff are not
> going to stay here with the type of kids we have here. So you have to keep
> good people here. (Harry Timber, Superintendent, October 2011)

Superintendent Timber also makes a correlation to his responsibility which directly links

his long tenure in the school district. Because of his longevity, he believes he is more

responsible for student achievement than a superintendent that has not been in a district

as long.

> With longevity, you can't point the finger. It is your district, it is your
> administrators, it is your teachers and it is your students. So you can't say
> it is the guy before me, the board before me; the board hasn't let me do it.
> You are accountable, good or bad. So you take it a little bit more serious
> and you have been allowed to bring in people and work with people over
> time. If I don't bring them along, it is my fault. I'm accountable, Some
> superintendents come in and say "what are my marching orders? I'll be
> gone in 4 years anyway." So they don't have to worry about being
> accountable. Superintendents that have short tenure don't really have that
> much accountability. And they are never accountable for student learning.
> If student learning is the goal; you can get short term learning which may
> not be long term learning. That can easily be done. But when you are
> looking at long term growth, then you have to be accountable. (Harry
> Timber, Superintendent, October 2011)

Principal Interviews

Principal Harold Sunrise credits the superintendent for providing good teachers

and supporting them in their training once they are hired. He also credits the

superintendent for leading by example. "We are very fortunate to have good teachers. He

(the superintendent) always wants people to further their education and will support it

financially from the district. We go to conferences and the superintendent is right with

us" (Harold Sunrise Principal October 2011).

Principal Kristie Trail speaks to the relationships that have been built in the staff.

> First and foremost it is the staff. They are a very dedicated staff. It is just
> so evident that they care. Another key is the relationships that teachers
> have with students. The staff development that the superintendent offers
> is phenomenal. I believe when he first came here, there were some pretty
> big problems that he has worked through. He has made a reputation for
> the district and himself that it's a good district. (Kristie Trail, Principal,
> October 2011)

Board Member Interviews

According to board member Jenny Peak, the staff, administration and board have

forged a good relationship with the community.

> We have a really good staff and we have come together with the
> community. There are people on the board that have connections with
> different people. That is an interesting dynamic. We have worked to get
> cohesive with teachers, superintendent, school board and community.
> (Jenny Peak, Board Member, October 2011)

Board members Jill Stream and Daniel Snowshoe speak about the quality of teachers and

the professional development opportunities that they have and the superintendent's role

as an "idea guy." "We have had a lot of teachers that have stayed for a long time in this

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district. The new crop has melded with the same ideas as the retired ones. I'd be the first

one to brag about the teachers" (Jill Stream Board Member October 2011).

> The teachers know when they come here they will be working with a different makeup of students. I believe that they see the positive leadership in the district and see that this is something they want to be a part of. The superintendent is always organizing and researching; being an idea guy; presenting to the board so the board can make a decision that is in the best interest of staff development and student achievement and then putting that into play and seeing it through. We can send people to staff development, but when they come back, what are they going to do with it and how does that influence student achievement? We put that stuff into play and we hold each other accountable for putting it into play and see if it is working. (Daniel Snowshoe, Board Member, October 2011)

Teacher Interviews

According to teacher Mary Moss, money for training has never been much of a

problem if it was justified.

> If we could say why we needed something, we could have it. Our district is really phenomenal in sending teachers away to workshops out of state. Thousands of dollars are spent on our teachers. This is huge especially when you compare teachers from around the country have or what you get to do. That is huge (Mary Moss, Teacher, October 2011)

John Branch talks about the support the superintendent gives teachers.

> If there is money, we can move forward. If a teacher has a good idea, the superintendent says lets figure it out. He is good in that way. He is that way with all the teachers. If it is something that is going to make them a better teacher and it is good for the kids, he is very supportive. (John Branch, Teacher, October 2011)

Teacher Helen Fox provides a direct link between the teaching staff and student

achievement gains. She also credits the superintendent with high expectations and

providing resources for professional development.

> Student achievement has increased because we have a staff that really cares. Our district is rather unique. We have a lot of poverty here. Teachers take a lot of time to do extras for kids. We have a lot of support from community. We take students as an individual. The superintendent has made us aware that student achievement gains are critical; based on his support of allowing time, training, all of those things. He provides resources and time for people to carry it out. I think that is huge. (Helen Fox, Teacher, October 2011)

Teacher Tina Downhill speaks about the vision of the superintendent to continue to make the district better.

> The superintendent is a guy who is thinking, thinking, thinking about ways to improve the school in different ways; whether it is the physical plant, whether it is providing workshops in bringing in people or people going to workshops outside. It is a pretty big deal to keep informed. He is very pro education, pro kid, pro community; he has always had a presence. (Tina Downhill, Teacher, October 2011)

Finally, teacher Jerry Frost believes that the superintendent is centrally involved in everyone's program and cares about the staff he has hired and does everything he can to provide training and support.

> The superintendent has been involved in everyone's program; that presence and the fact that he does everything he can to treat us like a family. He has really sacrificed at times for people on staff. There is a human side to him that is really awesome. I believe he has hired people that he has researched. So he has people on staff that has similar traits. And he truly cares about you and he checks up on you all the time; all the time. You want him to relax a bit but you appreciate all he does for you. (Jerry Frost, Teacher, October 2011)

Theme 5

The conditions within the community that promote the superintendent's longevity are the support of a well-trained and veteran school board as well as a supportive and "hands off" community.

Superintendent Interview

   The school board in the Alpine School District has had significant longevity. In

fact more than half of school board members have been on the board for 6 years or

longer, and the school board president has been on the board for 19 years. This longevity

as well as a supportive community that trusts the board and the school district to operate

unchallenged are the key conditions to why the superintendent has stayed in the school

district for 19 years. Superintendent Timber also finds comfort and energy in student

successes and teacher growth and the fact that many of the programs that he has

promoted have paid off through student achievement scores.

> Student successes, teacher growth, getting good teachers, seeing the gains
> you make; we do things very quickly here. We don't have to wait for a lot
> of committees to make decisions. We get the community involved and
> bring them in when they're needed on specific things like if there is a
> change in the financial outlook. One of the benefits of working in a
> poverty area is that they (the community) trust you and the board. The
> community does not tend to micromanage. They (the board) do not
> micromanage. They (the board) let the administration make the decisions.
> I make the recommendations and there a check and balance system in
> place. They (the board) know what their true function is (Harry Timber,
> Superintendent, October 2011)

Principal Interviews

According to Principal Sunrise, the community has become to feel that the school is part

of the community and they let you do your job.

> The community is interested in the school because it is part of the
> community. They leave you alone to do your job. Some districts don't do
> that. They want a say. We don't get letters to the editor. We don't get a
> lot of people at board meetings. (Harold Sunrise, Principal, October 2011)

Board Member Interviews

Board member Jenny Peak is proud of the fact that the board is diverse and comes from all different backgrounds. She is also proud of the fact that the board has received a great deal of training over the years through various conferences such as the Montana Conference of Educational Leadership (MCEL). In fact, the school district has received the Golden Gavel award 4 times. Those awards are clearly displayed on the walls of the board meeting room.

> We have a pretty cohesive school board. We all have very eclectic views. We all come from different backgrounds but have the same goals in mind; the sense that we want our kids to be the best they can be and to be able to achieve any goal they want no matter what background they come from. We have a lot of MCELs and road trips together. We know what is going on in other people's lives. And the superintendent has a lot of ideas. He gets "out there" because he is thinking outside the box. I think that is important in a superintendent that they actually have ideas and have compassion, and they have passion for their job. We are still on the same page about what is going to be great for the kids, not just great for us. (Jenny Peak, Board Member, October 2011)

Board member Jill Stream believes that the town respects the school and the employees of the school.

> I think people in this town respect the school and the people that spend time working here. This combination of community and school; there is something about it that is very important; maybe because the community accepted the superintendent and a lot of his ideas, people approved of. He has been involved in the community, at every meeting, and of course out there where all the people are. (Jill Stream, Board Member, October 2011)

Board member Stream also recognizes the importance of training and the differences she perceives when listening to board members from other school districts.

> Training for the board is very critical. When we go to MCEL we hear horror stories. I think we learn a lot from other trustees. The

superintendent is not demanding in training, but encourages us to do
everything we can to free up our schedule to go to MCEL. It is necessary.
(Jill Stream, Board Member, October 2011)

Board member Daniel Snowshoe points out a very important observation about how the

superintendent has evolved over the years in his goals and has changed as new challenges

have presented themselves.

The things that he has goals for this year, 6 years ago were not even on his
plate. As things start to change, your goals have to change to. His heart is
different now that when he first got here. I believe because of his heart as
a people person, staff, students community whatever, is what sets him
above and beyond most average people and administrators. (Daniel
Snowshoe, Board Member, October 2011)

Teacher Interviews

Teacher Mary Moss has observed the support that the school board has given the

superintendent which she says is a strength of the school district.

The school board has been around forever. I think that is another thing
that is a strength of our school. The superintendent has a very good
working relationship with the school board. He can get them to see his
way. They all seem focused on the goal. They are aware of the problems.
The board themselves gets along with everyone. Nobody is fighting a
brick wall anywhere. We are a very cohesive group. (Mary Moss,
Teacher, October 2011)

Teacher John Branch states that many connections with the community comes through

sporting events. In fact Superintendent Timber attends as many sporting events as

possible; even the ones that are out of the school district. This is a personal enjoyment

for him, but also a way to stay connected to families and students.

He has established relationships with the community mainly through
sporting events. He is thought of well in the community. We have never
had a push to get rid of the superintendent. He tries to be a take charge
person. Longevity of the board is hard to measure in terms of student

achievement. There is a huge comfort level in stability of the school district. There have been cool heads around the superintendent. (John Branch, Teacher, October 2011)

Helen Fox speaks about the importance of a supportive school board and the fact that two

of them are in the building helping on a regular basis.

Oh yes ,we have a very supportive school board; two of the school board members I see in the building two or three days a week. I think this is a good thing because they know what we are doing. We have 2 school board members that bring a lot of history to the board. Even though these school board members do not have kids here, they are still connected. (Helen Fox, Teacher, October 2011)

Teachers Tina Downhill speaks about the importance of people needing people in a small

town and how those relationships have developed between the superintendent, the board

and community.

He has a close relationship with the school board president and the school board; one that has developed over the years. I think it is important because it is a small community and people need each other. You rely on your friends as well as your "not" friends to get the task accomplished. I think he works very hard. (Tina Downhill, Teacher, October 2011)

According to Teacher Janice Hiker, Superintendent Timber is an advocate for teachers

and the school within the community.

There are people that just don't care for us (teachers) or for any of us for that matter. He (the superintendent) is admired. He does speak up for us. People kind of look at the schools and say they look pretty good so things must be going well. I have never heard anything negative said to me. I don't hear negative things about the school. The superintendent wants to know what people are thinking. He is not a man to lock himself up in his office and sneak away and come back in. He's available. If you want to talk to him you can, easily. He prefers input; whether he agrees or not. I think he is someone who is involved in the community. (Janice Hiker, Teacher, October 2011)

Teacher Jerry Frost sums up the relationship between the community, the school board

and the superintendent as allowing teachers to do their job without interruption and

scrutiny.

> You might laugh at this but I really believe that the framework of this
> district has allowed us to teach pretty much anything we want. We have
> very little opposition; very little input from parents. They just trust us to
> teach their kids; no questions. Here you have that freedom to go where
> your captain wants you to go; an interesting dynamic. (Jerry Frost,
> Teacher, October 2011)

Document Review

Document review was a part of this study. Documents that provided support to

the research questions in this study were requested to be reviewed. The following

documents were requested for review.

1. Demographic information about the community.

2. Demographic information about the school.

3. Minutes of school board meetings where district goals are discussed and
   adopted.

4. Minutes of administrative meetings where district goals are discussed.

5. Minutes of faculty meetings where district goals are discussed.

6. The district's 5 year educational improvement plan.

7. The district's school improvement plan for regional accreditation if
   applicable.

8. Samples of superintendent communication with the community.

9. Samples of superintendent communication with the school board.

10. Samples of superintendent communication with principals.

11. Samples of superintendent communication with teachers.

Superintendent Timber provided the following documents for review. The Five Year Comprehensive Education Plan; correspondence to the staff regarding a new evaluation system; a newspaper article regarding Superintendent Timber's stance on student learning in the school; correspondence from Superintendent Timber to the school board; school board minutes verifying that district goals were reviewed and discussed. A historical perspective on the success of school levies was also provided. From this document, it appears that the last levy that was passed for both the elementary and high school district was in the 2008 school year. This aligns with the increasing number of free and reduced student percentage indicating increased poverty in the community. This would also support the district's decision not to seek tax levies due to the community's inability to support increased taxes. Also included was correspondence with the district leadership team dated August 17th, 2011. The topic of this upcoming meeting was how to allocate funds from the Title 1 and Title 2 budget that are earmarked for staff development. This aligns with Superintendent Timber's comments regarding available funding going towards staff development. Included also was a "power point" presentation that was given at a community meeting regarding the budget during the 2010/11 school year. The topics for this particular meeting was how ANB (Average Number Belonging) drives school district budgets. Finally, a "power point" from the school's opening in-service includes an overview of district goals for the year. This document supports the fact that district goals are shared with staff.

Observations

Several hours over a two day period was spent gathering data and observing

Superintendent Timber. During the first day of the onsite visit, Superintendent Timber

spent time interacting with a school board member that was heading up a volunteer

project to enhance some ball fields by the high school. Superintendent Timber was

pleasant and complementary regarding the board members efforts. Several community

members were working onsite and he made a point of speaking to each one of them and

thanking them for their service. After school, Superintendent Timber joined the

researcher for dinner at a local restaurant. He spent a great deal of time speaking with

community members within the restaurant. He would call them by name and they would

greet him cordially. During day two of the visit, Superintendent Timber was observed

conversing with two more school board members regarding upcoming plans to attend a

conference. He talked about the schedule, when he would pick them up, and where they

would have dinner. He was pleasant and jovial in the conversation and the board

members seemed very comfortable with his plan. Research question 2 asks how do local

conditions influence longevity of the superintendent? The types of interactions observed

link to the findings of this study. By interacting in this manner, Superintendent Timber

was cultivating relationships with the school board and the community which has the

potential of influencing his longevity and student achievement.

Data Acquisition Matrix

Table 11 contains a data acquisition matrix for the Alpine School District. This

matrix has been developed to provide important information and validation of the themes.

Each theme is listed in the first column and followed by supporting data in the form of quotes.

Table 11. Data Acquisition Matrix.

Theme 1
Goals are established in cooperation with teachers through the utilization of a district leadership team and are formally adopted and supported by the school board.
We have a district leadership team that is made up that includes staff. We don't have the flexibility that we used to with the No Child Left Behind Act because the goals are pretty much set for us. Before that, you could vary a lot under the old school improvement model. I keep the school board members informed about goals. " **(Harry Timber, Superintendent, October 2011)**
"Goals many times start with issues that are happening in the district. They become a high priority or concern; typically academic issues. So it's not political issues that get into our goals. Because we are a small district, there is a third of your staff that is on the committee. You have a representative population. Teachers are pretty well involved here." **(Harold Sunrise, Principal, October 2011)**
"At the beginning of the year, he talks about the goals and what he thinks are important. We have a district leadership team. They provide input. School related topics. Meets maybe 3 times per year. The board is very supportive of goals." **(Ned Ravine, Principal, October 2011)**

Table 11. Data Acquisition Matrix (continued).

Theme 1 - continued
Goals are established in cooperation with teachers through the utilization of a district leadership team and are formally adopted and supported by the school board.
"The superintendent works on the goals and brings them to the leadership team and we discuss them and then he takes them to the board." **(Kristie Trail, Principal, October 2011)**
"We want to improve. And then we go back and see if it is working. We discuss whatever is coming in. Setting littler goals actually add to the bigger goal of kids learning. By solving little goals it helps with the big goals of getting students to achieve. For certain goals, we had community forums. It isn't always the answers; sometimes it is just the questions that are important."**(Jenny Peak, Board Member, October 2011)**
"We take a lot of guidance from the superintendent; where the important things are going along." **(Jill Stream, Board Member, October 2011).**
"Just like in any organization, goals are important in any individual's life. If we don't set something for ourselves, as an institution, you don't have a horizon or a picture to strive for; to motivate yourself and your staff. I think we are making progress with our mentoring program and the goals that we are trying to achieve with their academic program, in their testing and bringing their scores up. And that goes from anywhere from academics, to facilities, to athletics. It is very well rounded. If you don't have a mindset and heart set towards goals, you might as well check yourself off at the next term." **(Daniel Snowshoe, Board Member, October 2011)**

Table 11. Data Acquisition Matrix (continued).

Theme 1 - continued

Goals are established in cooperation with teachers through the utilization of a district leadership team and are formally adopted and supported by the school board.

"Every teacher is required to set individual goals. You have to meet with the principal. If you are on the educational leadership team you would have some input on goals. I am on the district leadership team. Principals are strong believers in goals for teachers, as well as the superintendent. It is always clearly defined as to what the district goals are going to be for that year. They always share what the goals are going to be. Once the goals are set they are supported by lot of people; the school board, principals and superintendent. They are supported by teaching staff." **(Mary Moss, Teacher, October 2011)**

"Since the superintendent has been here, we have spent a lot of time with vision and goal setting so everything is formalized. When the superintendent came, that is when a lot of it started. We are involved in everything. It is a small district. If you are in to doing things, you are on many committees in the district and leadership teams. I am involved in pretty much all of them." **(Helen Fox, Teacher, October 2011)**

"The school board has goals and we have had good school boards down through the years; really consistent people that lets the school run, wants to know what is going on but do not micromanage **(John Branch, Teacher, October 2011)**

Table 11. Data Acquisition Matrix (continued).

Theme 1 - continued

Goals are established in cooperation with teachers through the utilization of a district leadership team and are formally adopted and supported by the school board.

"He (the superintendent) gets the goals approved by the school board, the school board supports the superintendent; just no doubt about it at all." **(Janice Hiker, Teacher, October 2011)**

Document Data to Support Theme 1

The Five Year Plan contains goals of the district. Correspondence from the superintendent to the school board regarding goals and school board minutes verifying that district goals were reviewed and discussed.

A "power point" presentation from the schools opening in-service which includes an overview of district goals for the year. This document supports the fact that district goals are shared with staff.

Theme 2

Student achievement gains are the result of efforts of the superintendent, principals and veteran staff who analyze a wide variety of data.

"The superintendent is like a light house in taking a direct role in looking at the CRTs (Criterion Referenced Test) all the way to high school. For all the data looking that I do, he does just as much or more. He has a pretty intimate knowledge about that. I try to go that next step to look at individual kids. He will look at trends or patterns to see what we

Table 11. Data Acquisition Matrix (continued).

Theme 2 - continued
Student achievement gains are the result of efforts of the superintendent, principals and veteran staff who analyze a wide variety of data.

are doing right or doing wrong. So from a developmental aspect, he is a curricular specialist for the district. Someone's got to be and in our district we don't have a curriculum specialist. So that means it would go back to each building level and we are not likely to be cohesive. We would look at the same data sets for our district not really worrying about what the other district are doing. As the superintendent, they are all his. He is pulling it together. He seems to find the time to do that. That is his expertise is; on curriculum development and so he picked up that piece which then alleviates us having to do it. Because of his background expertise, he is able to do it and has found the time for that. He has made sure the dollars have been pooled together for professional development or there would not have been dollars to go with it." **(Harold Sunrise, Principal, October 2011)**

"I watched some teachers try something really innovative and new last year. They really looked at the data. We saw a lot of growth. They are a very dedicated staff. It is just so evident that they care"**(Kristie Trail, Principal, October 2011).**

"We are aware as a staff that our scores are pretty solid. I know my scores. We get scores online and analyze them ourselves. We look at every test release sight. I could tell you how the state scored and how other districts scored and how our grade level scored. We all do it because we want to see where the gaps are. What you see in a school district that is small, everyone really wants to do well you want to know the scores."
(Mary Moss, Teacher, October 2011)

Table 11. Data Acquisition Matrix (continued).

Theme 2 - continued

Student achievement gains are the result of efforts of the superintendent, principals and veteran staff who analyze a wide variety of data.

"Individually I am involved in data analysis. I don't do a lot with CRTs because I am in a lower grade but we have had the opportunity to give CRTs. We have looked at a lot of the test questions. The superintendent has really pushed that; breaking down the test. " **(Helen Fox, Teacher, October 2011)**

"The superintendent and our principals share a lot of data with us. So we know where we stand every year." **(Jerry Frost, Teacher, October 2011)**

Theme 3

Student achievement gains are enhanced by a strong and comprehensive professional development program that trains teachers in the use of a variety of researched base instructional strategies that enables a teacher to better engage students in a caring and respectful manner in order to obtain quality learning.

"We have six teacher development days that we instigated at least eight years ago. That has been a catalyst in bringing us together. We have six times a year for professional development on top of the seven PIR days we have in the district. When the state changed the requirements to where the school week was calculated in minutes, we turned that into six days of professional development; now we have plenty of time for professional development. It is a big, big, big item. In this district, district funds and

Table 11. Data Acquisition Matrix (continued).

Theme 3 - continued

Student achievement gains are enhanced by a strong and comprehensive professional development program that trains teachers in the use of a variety of researched base instructional strategies that enables a teacher to better engage students in a caring and respectful manner in order to obtain quality learning.

grant money are all spent on staff development. No one gets more staff development than our teachers. Because of this new law (No Child Left Behind) we needed to protect emotional needs of children and teachers. So we went big time into Love and Logic. I took the teachers and administrative team to Las Vegas. We had meetings with Jim Faye. We went to Love and Logic K-12. We had a parent training as well. We were looking at improving relationships between students and teachers; we then transitioned into Marzano. We went into instructional strategies to encourage higher-level thought processes. We brought in consultants and also would send 8 to12 people to workshops. We sent staff anywhere from Palm Springs to Park City. We also sent them to Las Vegas. We also brought in the concept of professional learning communities. We have allowed time for our teachers to talk with each other. We have focused on The Learning Cube this year. Now professional learning communities focus on how to concentrate on student data. I do no lock up grant money in the salaries like some districts do. I put it under staff development. ” **(Harry Timber, Superintendent, October 2011)**

Table 11. Data Acquisition Matrix (continued).

Theme 3 - continued

Student achievement gains are enhanced by a strong and comprehensive professional development program that trains teachers in the use of a variety of researched base instructional strategies that enables a teacher to better engage students in a caring and respectful manner in order to obtain quality learning.

"We are ahead of the state in a lot of areas because he (the superintendent) has always been ahead of the game. We were the first district as a nation to contract with Love and Logic. We had a 3 to 5 year contract with Love and Logic." **(Ned Ravine, Principal, October 2011)**

"In our school, it has changed our life. I know it has made a difference in teachers staying dedicated and basically thrilled with their job. It seems like when we get a goal and we put our mind to it, we are pretty successful at it." **(Kristie Trail, Principal, October 2011)**

"What we have been doing with staff development, it goes back to training; staff presents it to the board, we consider it. The time spent of researching a problem is significant. We might say, yea, we have this problem, but how are we going to tackle this problem and take care of? You start diving into the resources. The board is involved in this discussion. A lot of the legwork is brought to us." **(Daniel Snowshoe, Board Member, October 2011)**

Table 11. Data Acquisition Matrix (continued).

Theme 3 - continued

Student achievement gains are enhanced by a strong and comprehensive professional development program that trains teachers in the use of a variety of researched base instructional strategies that enables a teacher to better engage students in a caring and respectful manner in order to obtain quality learning.

"We have been doing a lot with the Learning Cube so the goals that we set are the things that are in front of us at the time. We have done a lot of stuff with Love and Logic through the years. We are doing some things with CRT improvement and Professional Learning Communities. That would fit into school improvement. " **(John Branch, Teacher, October 2011)**

"We have some of the very best in-service. I talk to other teachers I know. We have 6 extra days of in-service. We have big names that come into the district. When we have someone like that come in, and the superintendent provides that, it is hard not to grow. Huge support. I don't know of any other school district this size has what we have. Everybody is involved in goals." **(Helen Fox, Teacher, October 2011)**

"I do think our goal here is child centered. Work that we do, conferences we get sent to, presenters that the superintendent brings in all has to with the improvement of us as teachers as well as the students as learners. Everything revolves around this. It creates better dynamics with you and other teachers that you've never had the chance to know. Although the goals are top down, if there was something that I really wanted to go to that would support my teaching and the money was there, he would send me. This process is supported by the school board because the board supports the superintendent 100%." **(Rebecca Aspen, Teacher, October 2011)**

Table 11. Data Acquisition Matrix (continued).

Theme 4

Superintendent longevity has influenced student achievement through the hiring process, support for veteran teachers and resource alignment for professional development.

"Longevity in my case has helped me gain student achievement because I'm cocky. I have a board that supports me, an administration that's good and basically teachers that I've hired indirectly even though I am never on a teacher interview team. I'm behind the scenes looking at applications so when you get that you can be a risk taker. And if you're not a risk taker, I don't believe you can make positive changes. I do everything I can do hire a husband and wife team. I really stress the family approach." **(Harry Timber, Superintendent, October 2011)**

"We align resources by providing staff development that aligns with our goals. If you listen to teachers and treat them with respect, if you bring in people to provide them staff development it really helps. The longevity has allowed me to have time to look at the big picture and improve staff development. I don't take credit for it. You have to have good people. Good people are here because of where they live, the way they are treated, the staff development that they receive and the perks that they get. But if no longer they could make these trips, (staff development). If you couldn't have these things, it is going to catch up to you; whether its students, whether its teachers, whether its administrators, staff are not going to stay here with the type of kids we have her, if they are not able to get the things we have given them. So you have to keep good people here." **(Harry Timber Superintendent October 2011)**

Table 11. Data Acquisition Matrix (continued).

Theme 4 - continued

Superintendent longevity has influenced student achievement through the hiring process, support for veteran teachers and resource alignment for professional development.

"With longevity, you can't point the finger. It's your district, it's your administrators, it's your teachers and it's your students. So you can't say it's guy before me, the board before me, the board hasn't let me do it, you are accountable, good or bad. And that is, so you take it a little bit more serious and you have been allowed to bring in people and work with people over time. If I don't bring them along, it is my fault. I'm accountable, Some superintendents come in and say what are my marching orders; I'll be gone in 4 years anyway. So they don't have to worry about being accountable. So superintendents that have short tenure don't really have that much accountability. And they are never accountable for student learning. And if student learning is the goal; you can get short term learning which may not be long term learning. That can easily be done. But when you are looking at long term growth, then you have to be accountable." **(Harry Timber, Superintendent, October 2011)**

"We are very fortunate to have good teachers. He (the superintendent) always wants people to further their education and will support it financially from the district. We go to conferences and the superintendent is right with us." **(Harold Sunrise, Principal, October 2011)**

Table 11. Data Acquisition Matrix (continued).

Theme 4 - continued

Superintendent longevity has influenced student achievement through the hiring process, support for veteran teachers and resource alignment for professional development.

"First and foremost is the staff. They are a very dedicated staff. It is just so evident that they care. Another key is the relationships that teachers have with students. The staff development that the superintendent offers is phenomenal. I believe when he first came here, there were some pretty big problems that he has worked through. He has made a reputation for the district and himself that it's a good district. " **(Kristie Trail, Principal, October 2011)**

"We have a really good staff and we have come together with the community. There are people on the board that have connections with different people. That is an interesting dynamic. We have worked to get cohesive with teachers, superintendent, school board and community." **(Jenny Peak, Board Member, October 2011)**

"We have had a lot of teachers that have stayed for a long time in this district. The new crop has melded with the same ideas as the retired ones. I'd be the first one to brag about the teachers." **(Jill Stream, Board Member, October 2011)**

"If we could say why we needed something, we could have it. Our district is really phenomenal in sending teachers away to workshops out of state. Thousands of dollars are spent on our teachers. This is huge especially when you compare teachers from around the country have or what you get to do. That is huge." **(Mary Moss, Teacher, October 2011)**

Table 11. Data Acquisition Matrix (continued).

Theme 4 - continued

Superintendent longevity has influenced student achievement through the hiring process, support for veteran teachers and resource alignment for professional development.

"If there is money, we can move forward. If a teacher has a good idea, the superintendent says lets figure it out. He is good in that way. He is that way with all the teachers. If it is something that is going to make them a better teacher and it is good for the kids, he is very supportive." **(John Branch, Teacher, October 2011)**

"Student achievement has increased because we have a staff that really cares. Our district is rather unique. We have a lot of poverty here. Teachers take a lot of time to do extras for kids. We have a lot of support from community. We take students as an individual. The superintendent has made us aware that student achievement gains are critical; based on his support of allowing time, training, all of those things. He provides resources and time for people to carry it out. I think that is huge." **(Helen Fox, Teacher, October 2011)**

"The superintendent is a guy who is thinking, thinking, thinking about ways to improve the school in different ways; whether it is the physical plant, whether it is providing workshops in bringing in people or people going to workshops outside. It is a pretty big deal to keep informed. He is very pro education, pro kid, pro community; he's always had a presence." **(Tina Downhill, Teacher, October 2011)**

Table 11. Data Acquisition Matrix (continued).

Theme 4 - continued
Superintendent longevity has influenced student achievement through the hiring process, support for veteran teachers and resource alignment for professional development.

"He (the superintendent) is also innovative; seeing things coming down the road that might help. He then buys into it and then you know he's into it and he thinks everybody should be schooled in it." **(Janice Hiker, Teacher, October 2011)**

Document Data to Support Theme 4

Correspondence with district leadership team regarding allocation of funds from the Title 1 and Title 2 budgets that are earmarked for staff development.

Theme 5
The conditions within the community that promote the superintendents longevity are the support of a well-trained and veteran school board as well as a supportive and "hands off" community.

"Student successes, teacher's growth, getting good teachers, seeing the gains you make. We do things very quickly here. We don't have to wait for a lot of committees to make decision. We get community involved and bring them in when they're needed on specific things like if there is a change in the financial outlook. One of the benefits of working in a poverty area is that they trust you and the board. The community does not tend to micromanage. They (the board) do not micromanage. They let the administration make the decisions I make the recommendations and there a check and balance system in place. They know what their true function." **(Harry Timber, Superintendent, October 2011)**

Table 11. Data Acquisition Matrix (continued).

Theme 5 - continued

The conditions within the community that promote the superintendents longevity are the support of a well-trained and veteran school board as well as a supportive and "hands off" community.

"The community is interested in the school because it is part of the community. They leave you alone to do your job. Some districts don't do that. They want a say. We don't get letters to the editor. We don't get a lot of people at board meetings." **(Harold Sunrise, Principal, October 2011)**

"We have a pretty cohesive school board. We all have very eclectic views. We all come from different backgrounds but have the same goals in mind; the sense that we want our kids to be the best they can be and to be able to achieve any goal they want no matter what background they come from." We have a lot of MCELs and road trips together. We know what is going on in other people's lives. And the superintendent has a lot of ideas. He gets "out there" because he is thinking outside the box. I think that is important in a superintendent that they actually have ideas and have compassion and they have passion for their job. We are still on the same page about what is going to be great for the kids, not just great for us." **(Jenny Peak, Board Member, October 2011)**

"I think people in this town respect the school and the people that spend time working here. This combination of community and school, there is something about it that is very important. Maybe because the community accepted the superintendent and a lot of his ideas, people approved of. He has been involved in the community, at every meeting, and of course out there where all the people are." **(Jill Stream, Board Member, October 2011)**

Table 11. Data Acquisition Matrix (continued).

Theme 5 - continued

The conditions within the community that promote the superintendents longevity are the support of a well-trained and veteran school board as well as a supportive and "hands off" community.

Training for the board is "very critical. When we go to MCEL we here horror stories. I think we learn a lot from other trustees. The superintendent is not demanding in training, but encourages us to do everything we can to free up our schedule to go to MCEL. It is necessary." **(Jill Stream, Board Member, October 2011)**

"The things that he has goals for this year, 6 years ago were not even on his plate. As things start to change, your goals have to change to. His heart is different now that when he first got here. I believe because of his heart as a people person, staff students community whatever, is what sets him above and beyond most average people and administrators." **(Daniel Snowshoe, Board Member, October 2011)**

"The school board has been around forever. I think that is another thing that is strength of our school. The superintendent has a very good working relationship with the school board. He can get them to see his way. They all seem focused on the goal. They are aware of the problems. The board themselves gets along with everyone. Nobody is fighting a brick wall anywhere. We are a very cohesive group." **(Mary Moss, Teacher, October 2011)**

Table 11. Data Acquisition Matrix (continued).

Theme 5 - continued

The conditions within the community that promote the superintendents longevity are the support of a well-trained and veteran school board as well as a supportive and "hands off" community.

"He has established relationship with the community mainly through sporting events. He is thought of well in the community. We have never had a push to get rid of the superintendent. He tries to be a take charge person. Longevity of the board is hard to measure in terms of student achievement. There is a huge comfort level in stability of the school district. There have been cool heads around the superintendent." **(John Branch, Teacher, October 2011)**

"Oh yes we have a very supportive school board. Two of the school board members I see in the building two or three days a week. I think this is a good thing; because they know what we are doing. We have 2 school board members that bring a lot of history to the board. Even though these school board members do not have kids here, they are still connected." **(Helen Fox, Teacher, October 2011)**

"He has a close relationship with the school board president and the school board; one that has developed over the years. I think it is important because it is a small community and people need each other. You rely on your friends as well as your "not" friends to get the task accomplished. I think he works very hard." **(Tina Downhill, Teacher, October 2011)**

Table 11. Data Acquisition Matrix (continued).

Theme 5 - continued

The conditions within the community that promote the superintendents longevity are the support of a well-trained and veteran school board as well as a supportive and "hands off" community.

"There are people that just don't care for us, or for any of us for that matter. He is admired. He does speak up for us. People kind of look at the schools and say they look pretty good so things must be going well. I have never heard anything negative said to me. I don't hear negative things about the school. The superintendent wants to know what people are thinking. He prefers input; whether he agrees or not. I think he is someone who is involved in the community." **(Janice Hiker, Teacher, October 2011)**

"You might laugh at this but I really believe that the framework of this district has allowed us to teach pretty much anything we want. We have very little opposition. Very little input from parents. They just trust us to teach their kids. No questions. Here you have that freedom to go where your captain wants you to go. An interesting dynamic." **(Jerry Frost, Teacher, October 2011)**

Document Data to Support Theme 5

Document that outlines the historical perspective on passing levies in the district. With the passage of levies coinciding with a growing free and reduced population of students indicates a sensitivity to community wealth and ability to pay more for education.

Table 11. Data Acquisition Matrix (continued).

Observation Data to Support Theme 5

Interaction with board member that was heading up volunteer project to enhance ball fields. Superintendent was pleasant and complimentary.

Interaction with community members working on same project. Superintendent was pleasant and complimentary.

Interaction with community members at restaurant. Superintendent was friendly and approachable.

Interaction with board members as arrangements were made to attend conference. Superintendent was friendly, pleasant and jovial.

Cross Case Analysis

In this study, the Buffalo, Open Prairie and Alpine Districts were analyzed to help answer the following research questions; how does superintendent longevity provide a context through programs, relationships and culture that supports and enhances student achievement in schools and how do local conditions influence longevity of a superintendent? According to Yin (2009) an important step in analyzing a multi case study is through Cross Case Analysis. "Cross case synthesis can be performed whether the individual case studies have previously been conducted as independent research studies or as a predesigned part of the same study. In this way, the technique does not differ from other research studies" (Yin 2009, p. 156).

<u>Common Themes in All Three Districts</u>

1. All districts use data analysis to determine instructional improvement goals.

Data analysis was a central theme in each district. Sometimes data was analyzed

at the administrative level, but in all cases, teachers were heavily involved in analysis of

data whether it be CRT data, or other diagnostic processes. Teachers knew what student

scores were and what they were working on to increase scores. Data analysis also drove

goal setting efforts in all three districts.

2. In all districts, once goals are set, they are generally supported at all levels.

The process of goal setting was important but different in all three school districts.

In the Alpine and Open Prairie districts, goals were set in a top down fashion. In the

Buffalo School District, goals seemed to "bubble up" from the staff and then were

formalized and supported by the superintendent and school board. In all three districts,

however, once goals were established, they were generally supported by all parties. In

the document review, in the Open Prairie School District, the Comprehensive Education

Plan included goals that span a 5 year period. These goals included improvement of math

proficiency, improvement of reading proficiency and the integration of technology into

all curriculum and instruction. This document provided a foundation for school

improvement efforts in the district and also brought the district in compliance with

requirements established by the Montana Office of Public Instruction. In the Alpine

School District, school board minutes verified that district goals were reviewed and

discussed. Also, documents in the Alpine District, included a "power point" from the

school opening in-service which includes an overview of district goals for the year. This

document supports the fact that district goals are shared with staff.

3. In all districts, superintendents are involved in hiring and maintaining good

teachers and staff.

In all three school districts, superintendents were involved in hiring, weeding out

weak teachers and supporting and maintaining good veteran teachers. In all three

districts, there was a positive interaction between teachers and the superintendent. The

superintendent worked to support teachers through relationships and professional

development. Not all superintendents sat in on interviews, (Alpine), but all were either

directly involved or was working behind the scenes to hire and maintain the teachers they

wanted on their team.

4. In all districts, professional development is a key component.

All three districts put a lot of emphasis on professional development. This was a

critical element in the advancement of student achievement. Superintendents approached

this in different ways. For example in the Buffalo and Open Prairie Districts, teachers

were the ones instigating professional development opportunities. As long as the

superintendent had the money, they generally supported the teachers in requested

training. In the Alpine District, the superintendent worked with a district leadership

team, but also had his own ideas for professional development. Those ideas were then

"sold" to the board and teaching staff and the whole district, including the superintendent,

was involved in the training. Documents provided by the Alpine School District included

correspondence with the district leadership team dated August 17th, 2011. The topic of

this meeting was how to allocate funds from the Title 1 and Title 2 budget that are earmarked for staff development. This aligns with Superintendent Timber's comments regarding available funding going towards staff development.

5. In all districts, superintendents cited a supportive board and community as the primary reason they stayed in the school district.

All three superintendents cited school board and community support as a primary reason they have stayed so many years in the school district. This support has allowed them to realize their vision for the school district either through additional funding or through the absence of political unrest that could derail what they set out to do. This support was also noted by board members, principals and teachers as a key reason for the superintendent's longevity in the district. In the document review for the Buffalo School District, in the sample communication to parents, student enrollment data was provided which assists in giving parents a sense of what funding levels might be as a result of the state funding formula that is based primarily on student enrollment. This data was provided for multiple years so parents could see enrollment trends in the district. Also contained in community communication were dates of student events, parent teacher conferences, reminders about the process for applying for free and reduced lunch and congratulations on student conduct. An explanation regarding compliance with the No Child Left Behind law was also provided. This information contained a notice to parents as to the information that they might request regarding their child's classroom teacher. The remaining documentation dealt primary with general information shared with the teachers and school board. The documentation helped provide supplemental information

that illustrated the culture of the school and community in which the superintendent lives and works. It also provided information about efforts of the superintendent in creating a positive culture within the school district. In the Alpine School District, a newspaper article regarding Superintendent Timber's stance on student learning in the school helped in assuring the board and community of his position on academics. Also, a document that included a "power point" presentation that was given at a community meeting regarding the budget during the 2010/11 school year illustrated the communication efforts to continually keep the board and community informed. The topics for this particular meeting was how ANB (Average Number Belonging) drives school district budgets.

<u>Summary</u>

In this multi case study, three school districts were analyzed to answer the following research questions; how does superintendent longevity provide a context through programs, relationships and culture that supports and enhances student achievement in schools and how do local conditions influence longevity of a superintendent? Each district studied employs a superintendent that has been in the district for 8 or more years and student achievement in each district had increased over a 6 year period. Onsite interviews were conducted with superintendents, principals teachers and school board members to obtain data. After transcribing interviews and analyzing the data, the following themes were found.

Buffalo School District

Theme 1 – Goals are derived from data analysis driven from staff in collaboration with administration.

Theme 2 – Student achievement has increased due to hiring and maintaining good teachers and moving out weak teachers. These teachers are of high caliber who work well together, has pride, high expectations and compassion for the student body.

Theme 3 – Student achievement has increased due to the Response to Intervention program.

Theme 4 – Superintendent longevity has influenced student achievement through good leadership, support for professional development, financial support and support of ideas through his role as instructional leader.

Theme 5 – The conditions within the community that promote the superintendent's longevity are the fact that it is a good community to raise a family, the superintendent likes the school and the school board has supported the superintendent through an extended contract.

Open Prairie School District

Theme 1 – District wide goals are set by the superintendent who presents goals to the school board and once adopted are universally supported in the district.

Theme 2 – Student achievement has increased due to autonomy and support given to principals from the superintendent and teachers working together promote achievement.

Theme 3 – Superintendent longevity has influenced student achievement through the superintendent's involvement in hiring and maintaining good teachers and moving out weak teachers.

Theme 4 – Superintendent longevity has influenced student achievement by the superintendent's consistency, his support for professional development and the opportunity to carry out his vision for the school.

Theme 5 - The conditions within the community that promote the superintendent's longevity are a financially sound, supportive community and school board that bought in to the superintendent's vision.

Alpine School District

Theme 1 – Goals are established in cooperation with teachers through the utilization of a district leadership team and are formally adopted and supported by the school board.

Theme 2 –Student achievement gains are the result of efforts of a veteran staff who analyze a wide variety of data.

Theme 3 – Student achievement gains are enhanced by a strong and comprehensive professional development program that trains teachers in the use of a variety of researched base instructional strategies that enables a teacher to better engage students in a caring and respectful manner in order to obtain quality learning.

Theme 4 – Superintendent longevity has influenced student achievement through the hiring process, support for veteran teachers and resource alignment for professional development.

Theme 5 - The conditions within the community that promote the superintendents longevity are the support of a well-trained and veteran school board as well as a supportive and "hands off" community.

Cross case analysis was conducted and as a result, the following common themes were found.

Common Themes

1. All districts use data analysis to determine instructional improvement goals.

2. In all districts, once goals are set in the district, they are generally supported at all levels.

3. In all districts, superintendents are involved in the hiring and maintaining good teachers and staff.

4. In all districts, professional development is a key component in each school district.

5. In all districts, superintendents cited a supportive board and community as the primary reason they stayed in the school district.

This data revealed that superintendents in these districts focused on goals, hiring, professional development and cultivating a supportive board and community. Each superintendent approached these areas differently, however. For example, in the Buffalo School District, goal setting was not driven by the board or superintendent, but was driven by teacher ideas and then support was given. In the Open Prairie District, goals were set by the superintendent, given to the board for endorsement, and then principals and teachers went about implementing them. In the Alpine District, even though the

superintendent's ideas were clearly at the center of the goals, through the district leadership team and a school board that enjoyed debating goals, there seemed to be a greater awareness of goals among teachers and administrators and these goals were central to all school improvement efforts.

All districts put a big emphasis on hiring and it was evident that superintendents that had the greatest longevity believed that they had people on their staff that reflected the superintendents' beliefs. In the Buffalo District, the superintendent had only been in the district for 8 years and the majority of the staff had been hired by the previous superintendent. There was also emphasis on either improving the quality of teachers once they had been hired, or working to dismiss the teacher. Dismissal of weak teachers was cited as a priority with the Open Prairie superintendent.

All districts took different approaches to professional development. In the Buffalo and Open Prairie Districts, professional development was primarily centered around teacher ideas and not driven by a district wide effort that starts with school improvement goals. The Alpine District was much more prescriptive with professional development. The training was supported by substantial funding and staff involved in the improvement effort were required to complete the training.

All three districts provided evidence of cultivating a strong school board and community support. However, this support from both groups seemed more evident from superintendents with the most longevity; (Open Prairie and Alpine Districts). Perhaps the amount of time these superintendents had been in the districts had an influence on this

support and perhaps the understanding of the importance of this support prompted them

to put more emphasis on activities that would provide support.

Chapter 5 will present an overview of this multi case study and provide answers

to the two research questions. A discussion of the findings, recommendations and

suggestions for further research will also be presented.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Chapter 5 will present a summary of this study, its intent, research methodology and findings. Findings will be discussed and contributions to the existing body of research will be presented. Recommendations for further research will be provided and an overall summary of the study will conclude the chapter.

Intent of the Study and Literature Summary

In schools across this country, the school superintendent serves as the chief executive who is responsible for the education of thousands of students. But for all the responsibility that a superintendent has, there little job security. Unlike teachers who can gain tenure, superintendents are only protected by a contract that has been approved by the local board of trustees. Members on this board can change yearly and due to many factors within a school district, the tenure of a superintendent can be cut short. In fact, the national average for school superintendent tenure is between 6 and 7 years. One might wonder what the educational environment is for students and teachers in schools where there is frequent turnover of their chief executive officer and if in fact, it matters to the educational process if superintendents stay in a district for an extended period of time? One might also wonder what the conditions within a community are that allow a superintendent to stay in a district longer than the national average? This study was designed to answer these questions by analyzing three Montana school districts who have

superintendents with longer than average longevity in their district. The study focused

on two primary questions; how does superintendent longevity provide a context through

programs, relationships and culture that supports and enhances student achievement in

schools and how do local conditions influence longevity of a superintendent? What

follows is a review of the current literature on these two topics.

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Superintendent Longevity in Relation
to Student Achievement

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Researchers have found that there is a positive correlation between superintendent

longevity and student achievement (Waters and Marzano, 2006; Metcalfe, 2008; Myers,

2011). Metcalfe (2008) analyzed the relationship between superintendent tenure and

student achievement. Metcalfe found that it is critical for the superintendent to produce

positive student achievement since the average tenure of urban superintendents is 5 years

or less. In this study, the relationship between student achievement and superintendent

tenure was statistically significant. Metcalfe found that there is a relationship between a

superintendent's length of service and the increase or decrease in student achievement.

This study also found that the most common reason for superintendents to leave their job

was career advancement and not for low student achievement on standardized tests

(Metcalfe 2008). In a quantitative study completed by Myers (2011), the length of tenure

of a superintendent and academic achievement as defined by the percentage of students

who scored "Proficient" or better on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment

was analyzed. The results showed that among four predictive variables, total student

headcount had the strongest effect on the dependent variable, student achievement,

followed by percentage of free and reduced students, total years as a superintendent and then the length of tenure of the superintendent. Myers concluded that the length of a superintendent's tenure significantly impacts the outcome of the dependent variable at the .05 level. Myers also concluded that the total number of years of experience as a superintendent significantly impacted the outcome variable at the .05 level (Myers, 2011, p 68).

In a study about the perceptions of school board members and superintendent tenure, case study was used to determine factors that influence leadership behaviors from the perceptions of school board members (Atherton, 2008). This study involved a 20 year veteran of one school district and posed the question of how and why the superintendent choose to stay in one district and how he was able to stay so long. According to Atherton, there is little research that identifies the specific individual leadership behaviors of long term superintendents. This study found it challenging to separate the person from the superintendent and find separate factors from the behaviors. Superintendents need to be able to meet the political and instructional needs of the school board and the community they represent. Atherton found several factors and behaviors that caused the superintendent to remain in the district for so long. The factors included the size of the school district, established faculty and other personnel relationships and the fact that the school community shows appreciation for the superintendents efforts. Another important factor was that the school board described the superintendent as a "good fit" and gave regular positive feedback and evaluations. Atherton found several behaviors of the superintendent to be important to his longevity. These behaviors

included the fact that he superintendent was resilient, he was recognized as an

instructional leader, he modeled what he expected from staff, and he had a positive

relationship with the union (Atherton, 2008).

In a 2008 study, challenges faced by public school superintendents in Texas

schools were analyzed (Trevino et al., 2008). In this study, researchers analyzed

challenges faced by 46 school superintendents and found that these challenges included

politics, testing requirements, funding, wealth of school district and the lack of teacher

quality. Superintendents had concerns for their tenure in the district due to these

challenges. "If society's expectations to increase student performance continues, then the

current challenges of the superintendency must be better understood" (Trevino et al.,

2008).

Jacobs (2010) found that the impact of a superintendent's leadership may vary

depending on the size of the school district and the length of tenure. In analyzing

districts in Texas, Jacobs found that mean student scores on the Texas Assessment of

Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) was statistically significant where superintendents served

3 years or more. Although this study does not tie superintendent longevity directly to the

these mean increases, schools experienced their greatest increase in TAKS scores during

this 3 year tenure.

<div align="center">

Local Conditions that Influence
Superintendent Longevity

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Many times superintendents are not only working to improve student

achievement, they are also struggling to keep their job. Several studies have analyzed the

longevity of school superintendents in one school district. The average tenure of a school superintendent ranges from 2.75 years for urban superintendents (Council of Great City Schools, 2000), to 6 to 7 years for the average of all superintendents (Natkin, Cooper, Alborano, Padilla, & Ghosh, 2002). The average tenure for participants in a study of one hundred forty one Texas superintendents was five years with an average male tenure of 4.8 years and an average female tenure at 6.2 years (Byrd, Drews, & Johnson, 2006). This quantitative study revealed that longevity decreased as the level of difficulty working with the board president or board members increased. Superintendents also cited increased politics as a contributing factor to instability in the profession. Superintendents new to a district spent more time in relationship building with the school board and community groups. Fiscal resources did not significantly affect tenure (Byrd, Drews, & Johnson, 2006).

Johnson (2005) found that superintendents who were accessible and worked to build a close relationship to the community, respected local traditions and maintained transparency in their governance style tended to stay in the position longer than those that did not. This study cites the importance of building connections with community members and other district stakeholders such as teachers and parents. Extended tenure for superintendents was partially attributed to the understanding and connection to the community (Johnson, 2005).

In a study that used social capitol theory to analyze superintendent relationships with the school board and community, Peterson and Williams (2007) found that "district superintendents tread a fragile bridge where the sustainability of their leadership is

dependent upon their mastery of the interplay among ethics, advocacy, and community

relations" (p.2). This qualitative study included 13 participants ranging from school

board presidents, district superintendents, executive directors of state boards of education

as well as state administrator associations. The researchers found that good public

relations were critical to all superintendents. Public relations was how superintendents

interacted with their community and maintained relationships with their school board

president. The board president played a large role in the superintendent's relationship to

the rest of the board and community and "garnered extra capitol as they were elected

again to the chair by their fellow board members. As a result of their positions, the board

president's perceptions of superintendents carried extra influence and legitimacy"

(Peterson and Williams, 2007, p.12). In interviews with board chairs, it was commonly

responded that superintendents influenced, educated, was an effective communicator and

"made the school look good" (p.12). Communication was a critical factor with

superintendents. In one interview the following response was recorded;

> The better you inform your board, the better you keep them informed, the
> better you listen to them and their concerns, the better you will be. Now,
> you can't be all things to all people, and you can't be all things to the
> board; but if you are listening to them and you understand their concerns
> and they are listening to you, then you are communicating what is taking
> place and I feel you can be successful. You may not always like to hear
> what you are hearing but we are not going to kill the messengers; we are
> going to understand what we are hearing (Peterson and Williams, 2007,
> p.15).

This data links to second research question in this study; how do local conditions

influence the longevity of the superintendent?

<center>Methodology of the Study</center>

The methodology of this study was a multi case qualitative design. According to

Yin (2009), the same study may contain more than 1 case. In this study, each school was

the subject of an individual case study, but the study as a whole covered more than one

school. Herriott and Firstone (1983) described multi case designs as "having distinct

advantages and disadvantages in comparison to single case designs. The evidence from

multi cases is often considered more compelling and the overall study is therefore

regarded as being more robust" (p. 53). By using multi case study, the researcher had the

opportunity to look across the three cases to find commonalities similar to all.

This design fit this study as multiple school districts and superintendents were

included to analyze the subject of school superintendents and in particular, superintendent

longevity. As has been already mentioned, superintendent longevity in one district is

sometimes limited by a variety of factors. Although there is research that informs us that

the length a superintendent is in a school district has influence on student achievement,

this study helped in understanding how this influence occurs.

To establish the sample from which to determine the cases and boundaries for this

study, a population of superintendents as well as student achievement data was

established.

Superintendent Longevity

For this study, 8 years in one school district was established as the minimum

amount of years a superintendent must have served in order to be in the population for

this study. The rationale for this term of years is the fact that this term exceeds the national average and provides evidence of stability in Montana school districts.

Only superintendents that served in a school district that contained at least one elementary school and one high school were included in the population for this study because the criterion reference data that was analyzed began when students were in 6th grade and ended when they were in 10th grade. So in order to obtain this data, it was important that the school district studied contained an elementary school and a high school.

As of the date of this study, there were 25 Montana superintendents that met these criteria (Darrell Rud, School Administrators of Montana, June 2011).

Student Achievement Data

In order to comply with the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), the Montana Office of Public Instruction implemented the Montana Comprehensive Assessment System (MontCAS) in September of the 2005/06 school year (Montana Office of Public Instruction). Requirements for MontCAS is that each student from 3rd grade through 10th grade take a criterion referenced test (CRT) called Measured Progress. Data from this test was first recorded in the 2005/06 school year and each year thereafter. For this study, students who were in 6th grade in 2005/06 were in 10th grade in 2009/10. Criterion referenced test percentile scores in reading and math were analyzed for students when they were in 6th grade in 2005/06 and again when they were in 10th grade in 2009/10. These percentile scores were recorded for 20 of 25 schools mentioned above that had superintendents that had been in the district for 8 years or more. For 5 of the original 25

schools, due to their small size, scores were not available. Percentile scores for the

remaining 20 schools were recorded for students that were novice, nearing proficient,

proficient and advanced.

The rationale for using CRT data was that longitudinal CRT data shows how a

cohort of students progressed in academic achievement over a multiyear period. To

determine growth on the CRT, the categories of math and reading were utilized. To

establish what the proficiency level was for 6th grade in 2005/06, the percentage of

students that were considered proficient plus advanced in both reading and math was

recorded. This percentage was again recorded in the 2009/10 school year when this

cohort was in 10th grade. Three school districts who had the highest percentage of gain in

reading and math combined, gave permission to be in the study, and had no conflict of

interest with the researcher, were included in the study.

<u>Findings in Relation to Theory Base</u>

The theory base for this study was systems theory and transformational leadership

theory. Each district studied utilized these theory bases to differing degrees. For

example, the Buffalo School District and the Alpine School District utilized system wide

thinking to a very high degree. In system wide thinking, change is accomplished by

different departments and individuals within the school system working together on a

project that is related in nature. In the Buffalo School District, the system that was

utilized primarily was the Response to Intervention (RTI) program. This program was

central to the success of students in the opinion of school board members, administrators

and teachers and was supported by professional development, time and resources.

Although primarily centered at the elementary level, teachers and students at all levels

benefited from this program. In the Alpine School District, a number of system wide

programs were supported by a wide variety of entities in the school district. The Love

and Logic program was a foundational program at all levels. All current staff and new

staff are sent to training for this program. Many staff credit this program as fundamental

in change efforts in student relationships and behavior. The Learning Cube was another

program that was implemented and supported district wide. A large majority of

participants credited this program for changing the way instruction was delivered. These

programs were supported by professional development, time and resources. Both

districts also used human systems thinking which emphasizes people's roles and

relationships within the organization.

In the Open Prairie District, a specific system as described by Senge et al. (2000)

was not apparent. Although programs such as the RTI and Advanced Placement classes

were being used, system wide efforts were not as prevalent as the other two districts. The

strength of this district came in the form of the superintendent's vision for the school

district and hiring and maintaining quality teachers. Human systems were utilized,

however, not to the degree as in the Buffalo and Alpine District.

The best example of transformational leadership could be found in the Alpine

School District. Superintendent Timber was a central figure in the district and through

his efforts over many years certainly has increased the level of motivation and morality in

teachers, principals and school board members. He was described as a father figure in

the district and a person that genuinely cared for the educational process and the success of students. The school district and its success was described as being central to who he was as person. He was described as a person with academic ideas and because of the support base he had secured with the school board and community, if you heard an idea 3 times or more from the superintendent, it was probably going to happen. This transformation came in a school that once had a vibrant healthy economy to one that now serves over 70% free and reduced student population. More detail regarding the relationship of findings to the theory base can be found later in this chapter.

Findings

After transcribing interviews and analyzing the data, the following findings were determined.

Research Question 1

Research question 1 asks how does superintendent longevity provide a context through programs, relationships and culture that supports and enhances student achievement? This question is clearly answered from the data and is explained in the following 3 findings.

Finding 1

Superintendent longevity supports and enhances student achievement by the superintendent's involvement in hiring and retention of good teachers in a consistent manner over many years.

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In all three school districts, hiring and retention of good teachers was a central

theme. A new superintendent inherits the staff from previous administrations. In some

cases, they may work to remove weak staff or provide additional professional

development to enhance their abilities. The longer a superintendent is in a district, the

more time they have to make decisions about the staff and administrative team that will

help carry out their vision. The superintendent can also influence the school by being

involved with the staff that they hire. Hiring is prescriptive with a plan and vision in

mind and those teachers that are hired align with the superintendent's values and beliefs

and the teacher's beliefs align to the mission and purpose of the school as promoted by

the superintendent. Superintendents in this study not only hired teachers that align with

their belief, but also terminated those that did not align with their beliefs. The

superintendents in the Open Prairie and Alpine Districts had been in the district for 18 or

more years. The teachers and staff in these districts may better reflect the

superintendent's vision than the superintendent in the Buffalo School District and due to

the consistency over many years. This finding is supported by the following quotes from

each of the superintendents.

> I think we have been able to continue to put the right people on the bus.
> Some teachers were not willing to adapt to some of the changes that we
> have been making so rather than saboteurs or blockers; they simply left.
> So we take seriously the fit of our teachers within this community. Not
> only the teachers, but also our classified staff and our coaches; we want
> the best adults working with our kids. And we have had the luxury to
> embrace that philosophy. We have been able to have that exceptional
> teacher in our school. Staffing is key. (John Antelope, Superintendent,
> October 2011)

Superintendent Grassley expressed it this way;

> Basically, when it comes right down to it, it is the hiring that you do that's important. When someone steps out of line, they know what is going to happen; everyone does. When we have problem with teachers, I will sit down with principals and if there is a plan of improvement; I write that up. If teachers clean the problem up, then that is done. We will place it in their file, but we are not messing with them unless the problem comes back. (Jerry Grassley, Superintendent, October 2011)

Superintendent Timber expressed it this way;

> I have a board that supports me, an administration that's good and basically teachers that I've hired indirectly even though I am never on a teacher interview team. I'm behind the scenes looking at applications so when you get that you can be a risk taker. And if you're not a risk taker, I don't believe you can make positive changes. I do everything I can to hire a husband and wife team. I really stress the family approach. (Harry Timber Superintendent October 2011)

Finding 2

Superintendent longevity supports and enhances student achievement by the superintendent supporting and providing consistent resources for professional development over a period of many years.

In all three school districts, providing resources for and designing professional development for their staff was a central theme that linked to student achievement. This was an ongoing process as was hiring and support for teachers, but was a bit different between the districts. In the Buffalo School District, ideas for professional development "bubbled up" from staff and was supported by the superintendent and school board. In the Open Prairie School District, teachers who could justify the reason for the professional development was supported by the superintendent as well as the board. In

fact, the implementation of Advanced Placement classes in this district was a planned

event and teachers were sent to Seattle for training. This was cited by the superintendent,

the teachers and the board. In the Alpine School District, the professional development

program was much more prescriptive and driven by the superintendent. The

superintendent served as more of an "idea guy" who stayed current with trends in

education and brought these ideas to the district leadership team and school board. Once

training was decided on, all those in the school that could benefit from the program was

sent to training. A significant difference in this training from the other schools was that

the superintendent in the Alpine School District attended the trainings with the teachers.

That was an important aspect of his leadership in the eyes of teachers. Also in the Alpine

District, professional development was geared toward school wide programs that had

been adopted such as Love and Logic or the Learning Cube.

Data was also used in all three school districts to determine professional

development needs. Again the Alpine Superintendent was much more centrally involved

in data analysis, but data was analyzed by teachers and principals in all three school

districts. Longevity allows the superintendent to see whether or not the professional

development has an overall impact on student achievement or whether another direction

is needed. The importance of this finding is illustrated by the following quotes.

> It is the support of the teachers which results in support of the students; financially and innovation that makes sense to me; to be able to match the strengths of teachers to see how it is going to affect students in the most positive way. When I see a program that is innovative and helps students, I am a huge advocate. Professional development has been a large factor for teachers and classified staff. We also have matched up teachers with their professional development needs. When there is a compelling need,

we have brought trainers in and on occasion have invited county wide
schools in to help fill the slots. (John Antelope Superintendent October
2011)

Superintendent Grassley expressed it this way;

We encourage them (teachers) to go off to training during the summer and
we pay for that. I think different. I don't look at this year. I have always
looked out. I am trying to look at what's best for 5 years from now.
(Jerry Grassley, Superintendent, October 2011)

Superintendent Timber expressed it this way;

We have six teacher development days that we instigated at least eight
years ago. That has been a catalyst in bringing us together. We have six
times a year for professional development on top of the seven PIR days we
have in the district. It is a big, big, big item. In this district, district funds
and grant money are all spent on staff development. No one gets more
staff development than our teachers. I do not lock up grant money in the
salaries like some districts do. I put it under staff development. (Harry
Timber Superintendent October 2011)

Finding 3

Superintendent longevity supports and enhances student achievement by the

superintendent removing obstacles so teachers can teach without distractions. This

includes efforts to foster a supportive school board and supportive community and takes

time to cultivate.

In all three school districts, the superintendent worked to remove obstacles to

allow teachers to teach without distractions. Distractions in education come in many

forms. Political distractions come in the form of unrest with the school board and

superintendent or a community that is unhappy with the actions of the school or particular

teachers.   Financial distractions come in the form where a community will not support a

levy for more money to the general fund or for much needed facility upgrades. There may be distractions where weak teachers are not providing effective instruction and test scores are slipping because of it. There may be legal distractions due to grievances filed by a local teacher's union over a dispute in the collective bargaining agreement. A significant distraction may also be frequent turnover in the superintendency.

Turnover of the Superintendency
and the Impact on Schools

Current research informs us as to what leads to superintendent turnover but does not inform us as to the impact. Studies have found that the average superintendent tenure was found to decrease as the level of difficulty working with the board president or board members increased. Superintendents also cited increased politics as a contributing factor to instability in the profession. Superintendents new to a district spent more time in relationship building with the school board and community groups (Byrd, Drews, & Johnson, 2006).

In a review of recent literature, there is no research that focuses exclusively on superintendent turnover and its direct effect on student performance. Waters and Marzano (2006) Metcalfe (2008) and Myers (2011) found that superintendents could have significant influence on student achievement in as little as two years, but did not focus on problems that frequent superintendent turnover could cause.

There is some evidence in this current study that supports the concept that there is a distraction to the educational process by the non-renewal of superintendents on a regular basis. This idea is supported by the following quotes by participants in this study.

I would think just in consistency. The more consistency you have; especially with superintendents, they are the head of the school. They are the ones that oversee everything. I would say that him being an ambitious goal oriented person and then being here to see them through is important. In my opinion I see it does help. I don't mind change. But I don't want things changing right now because I like what is going on; but it can be. (Beth Pony Teacher Open Prairie School District, October 2011)

Superintendent Harry Timber describes it as follows;

With longevity, you can't point the finger. It's your district, it's your administrators, it's your teachers and it's your students. So you can't say it's guy before me, the board before me, the board hasn't let me do it, you are accountable, good or bad. So you take it a little bit more serious and you have been allowed to bring in people and work with people over time. If I don't bring them along, it is my fault. I'm accountable, Some superintendents come in and say what are my marching orders; I'll be gone in 4 years anyway. So they don't have to worry about being accountable. So superintendents that have short tenure don't really have that much accountability. And they are never accountable for student learning. And if student learning is the goal; you can get short term learning which may not be long term learning. That can easily be done. But when you are looking at long term growth, then you have to be accountable. (Harry Timber, Superintendent, Alpine School District October 2011)

Teachers may be more willing to move towards changes in policy or educational programs if they know that the leadership is solid and they will not be expected to implement new ideas about policy or educational programs every 3 to 4 years. Although research has yet to confirm this, superintendent turnover may be one of the most disruptive factors in schools and it has the potential in getting in the way of effective education in the classroom.

The classroom is where true education occurs and good teachers are the key to student success. According to Hammond (2006), the primary factor in student success is the knowledge level of teachers (Hammond 2006). So if the primary factor in student

success is the knowledge level of teachers, then superintendents can enhance this and

support this through the hiring process, through providing quality professional

development opportunities and by forging positive relationships with the school board

and the community which provide teachers support financially, professionally and

emotionally.

It takes time in a school district to hire, provide professional development and to

forge those relationships of trust between the school board, the superintendent and the

community. That is how this finding links to longevity. Once these relationships

develop, teachers are less distracted by controversial events in the district and can focus

on improving student's lives through effective instruction. This finding is summed up in

the following quotes.

> Yes I think there is a sense of security. I think consistency and longevity of administrators is very important as long as their heart is in the right place. A superintendent needs to ask, "what do I have to do to encourage my teachers to work hard, to make them feel that they make a difference; to give them the tools they need to make a difference."   The superintendent is more like the captain of the ship. He doesn't affect me daily, but he does effect the overall tone of the school. If you have the same superintendent, it is likely that you would have the same staff. And with the same staff, you are able to create consistency. (Helen Hide, Teacher, October 2011)

Teacher Jerry Frost had this to say;

> You might laugh at this but I really believe that the framework of this district has allowed us to teach pretty much anything we want. We have very little opposition. Very little input from parents. They just trust us to teach their kids. No questions. Here you have that freedom to go where your captain wants you to go. An interesting dynamic. (Jerry Frost, Teacher, October 2011)

There is an old saying that if the elephants fight, the grass gets trampled. This occurs daily in schools across this country. School board and community distrust leads to dysfunction in a school system and many times leads to the superintendent's contract being "bought out" or non-renewed at the end of the contract. The consistency that teachers felt in all three districts in this study gave them a sense of security. This links directly with the removal of obstacles. The importance of this finding is summed up in the following quote.

> If you have down the nuts and bolts of school administration, funding, hiring and firing; employment; you would have more time to focus on curriculum and what is needed. If you are not feeling threatened, you are not feeling challenged every step along the way by the public or school board, if you feel secure in those matters, you can probably feel more comfortable to spend more time as to what needs to be done for the advancement of the school. If your funding is secure, you are not scared every fiscal year whether or not you are going to be broke. I believe, if he (the superintendent) doesn't have to worry about funding and where the money is going to come from and panic about this and that and panic about losing his job because the board is on his back, panic about what the public thinks; I think that allows to him to free his time and focus on what is really important; to make sure our academics are increasing every year. He has that ability. (Daniel Badger, Board Member, October 2011)

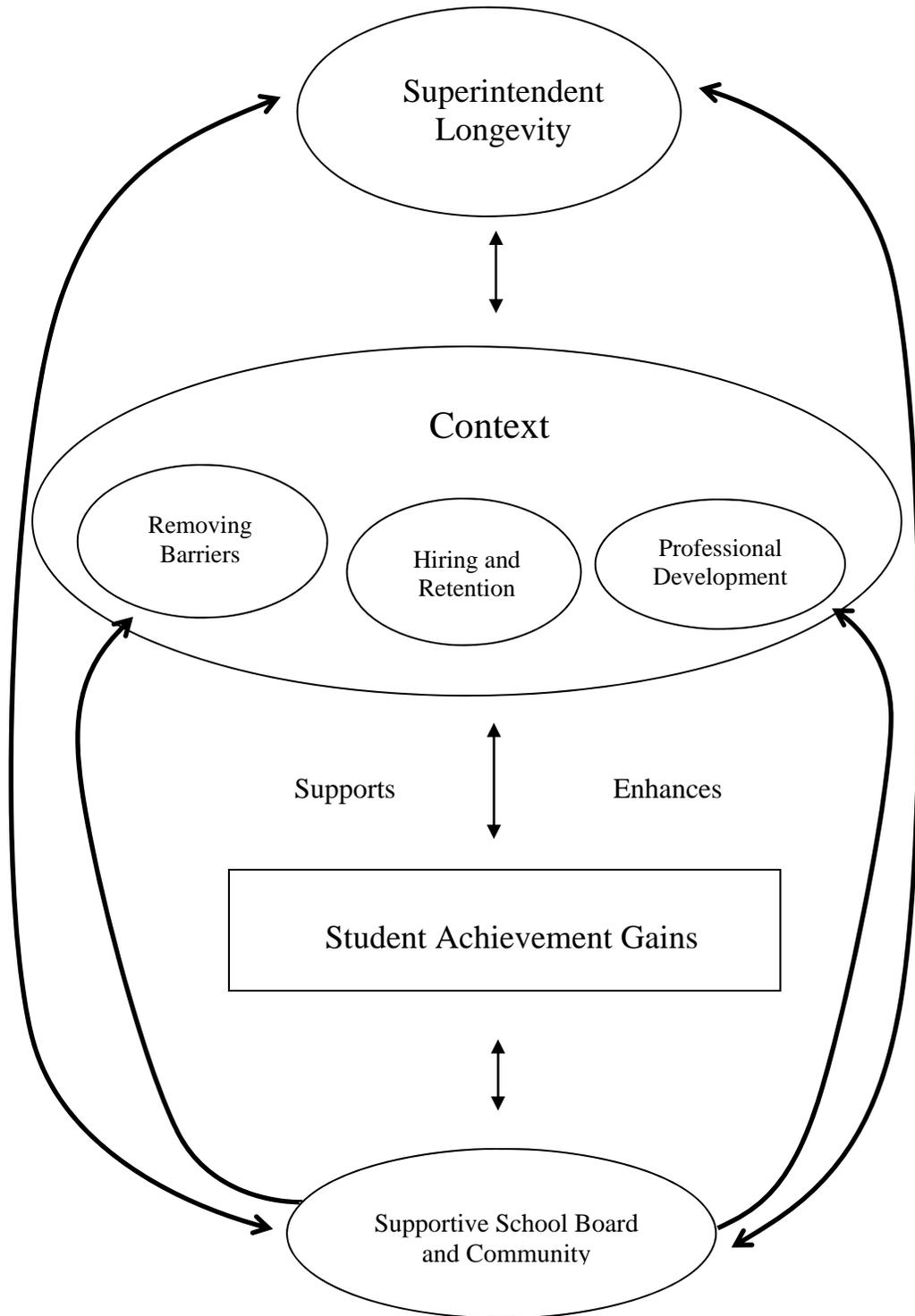Figure 4 illustrates research question 1.

Figure 4. How Superintendent Longevity Provide a Context
through Program Relationships and Culture that Supports and
Enhances Student Achievement.

Finding 3

It should be noted finding 3, that references superintendents removing obstacles so teachers can provide outstanding instruction, has not been found in other research on this topic. This is an important finding because teachers are hired to teach; not to deal with extraneous issues such as politics, finances, and personal attacks from community or school board members. Superintendents that become allies of teachers protect them from issues that have little or nothing to do with promoting student achievement.

Research Question 2

Research question 2 asks how do local conditions influence longevity of a superintendent? This question is clearly answered from the data and is explained in finding 4.

Finding 4

Local conditions influence the longevity of a superintendent through consistency and stability created by a supportive school board and supportive community that has been cultivated over many years.

In all three school districts there was ample evidence that consistency and stability created by a supportive school board and community was the primary contributor to a superintendent's longevity. This consistency came in the form of support of policies, support of goals, support for financial measures, and support through extended contracts. However, garnering a supportive board and community did not come automatically. The superintendent worked in a variety of ways to garner support with both groups. Each

supportive board was cited in contract extensions. In the Buffalo School District for

example, the board was willing to extend the contract by two years each time renewal

came up. So the superintendent always had a three year contract in place. In all three

districts, there was a degree of longevity on the school board; in particular the Open

Prairie District where the board chairman had been on for 17 years and in the Alpine

District, where the board chair had been on the board for 19 years. Stability on the

school board may be an indication that the school district is stable as well. A supportive

community not only gave the superintendent moral and emotional support, but in the case

of the Open Prairie District, financial support as well. The importance of this finding is

illustrated the following quotes. "The board, they gave me a 2 year contact right off.

They have been extremely supportive" (John Antelope, Superintendent, October 2011).

"Board support has been a primary factor and one of the reasons he stayed. The contract

provided stability by extension of the contract. (Employment) contract security has to

factor in" (Brenda Bruin, Board Member, October 2011).

> It does not hurt to be from a wealthy district; (where you don't have to) fight and claw for every penny. They (the community and board) help and support you this way or that. It is not a bad place to live. It is a nice community. We have a brand new library, a brand new hospital, and a brand new school. (Daniel Badger, Board Member, October 2011)

> He has established relationships with the community mainly through sporting events. He is thought of well in the community. We have never had a push to get rid of the superintendent. He tries to be a take charge person. Longevity of the board is hard to measure in terms of student achievement. There is a huge comfort level in stability of the school district. There have been cool heads around the superintendent. (John Branch, Teacher, October 2011)
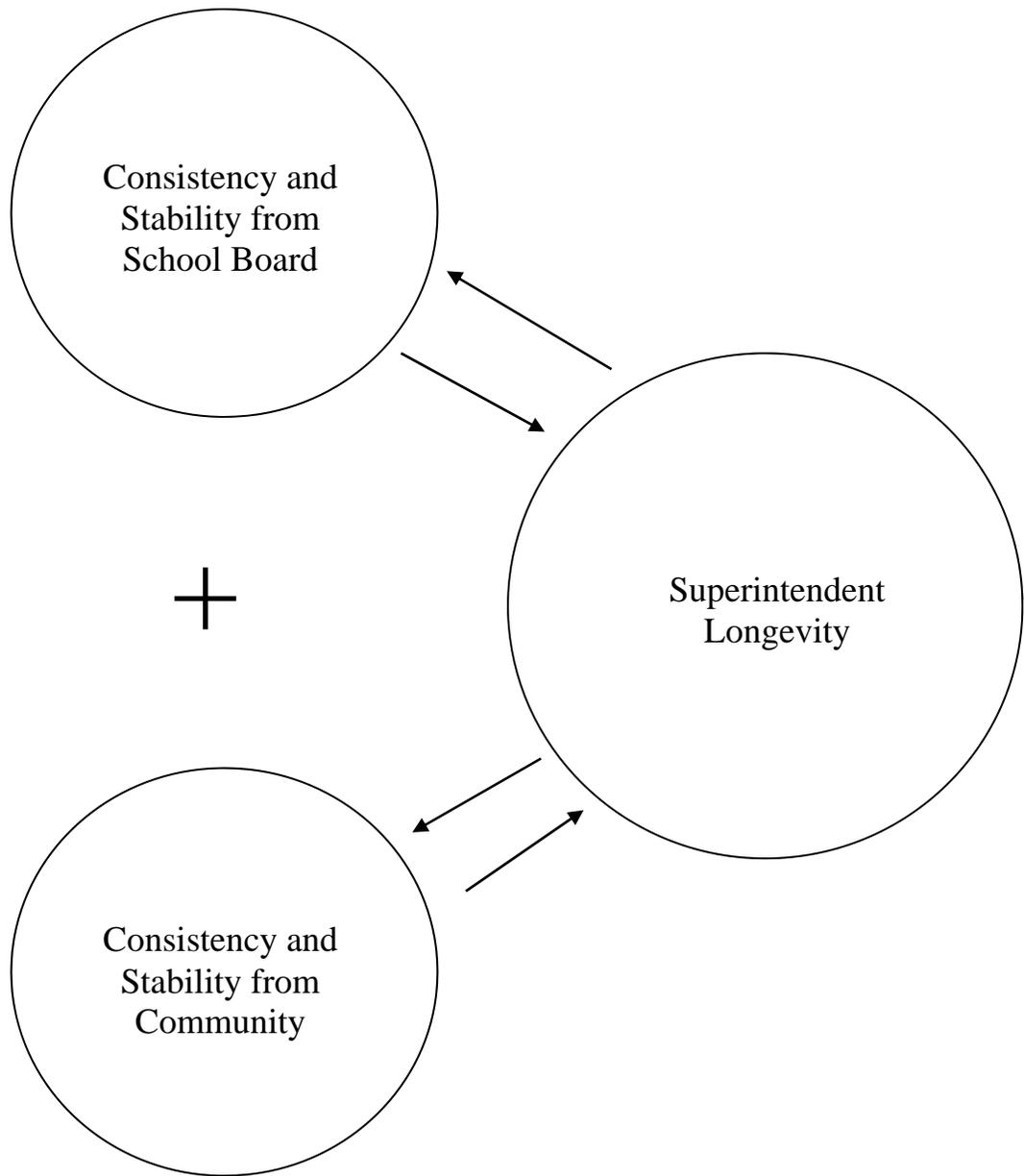
Figure 5 illustrates research question 2.

Figure 5. How Local Conditions Influence Longevity of a Superintendent.

Implications of Study

Hiring and Supporting Teachers

All three superintendents were either directly or behind the scenes in the hiring process. This study shows that as a superintendent, if you want the people on your team that you need to fulfill your vision, you need to be involved in the hiring process. This process takes time to develop. Many teachers may look outstanding in the early years, but their qualities may start to decline after a period of time. The consistency of monitoring and providing professional development is critical to the long term performance of staff. Superintendents that are in the district for a limited time may not have as much influence on teacher performance.

Many districts leave hiring decisions to principals or other hiring committees. The people that are hired may or may not fit into the superintendent's vision for the district. If hires are made that do not fit, then the superintendent will still be accountable for student success, but without the team members needed to secure the success. In a recent study, Mart (2011) found that superintendents believed one of the most important influences on student achievement is hiring quality personnel. "The quality of the teacher is the most important school factor leading to improved achievement results" (Mart, 2011, p. 102).

Professional Development

Professional development was a central theme in all three school districts. Although the professional development was approached in different ways, it was a key

component in training teachers in the latest teaching and learning techniques. In order to

gain maximum efficiency from teachers, the superintendent must play an instructional

leadership role in the district. Superintendents should stay current on the latest trends in

education through attendance at state and national meetings as well as reading the latest

educational journals. Superintendents should also should take advantage of seminars and

coursework at local universities that provide information on trends in instruction. Too

many times superintendents get bogged down in issues such as finances, collective

bargaining, and politics and simply become managers. These areas certainly need to be

attended to, however, instruction should be central to the superintendent's focus and

should not be left to curriculum directors or principals. In order for professional

development to occur, the superintendent needs to ensure that it is a priority in the annual

budget. Professional development is difficult to offer if the resources are not allocated.

In these tight economic times, funding for professional development is difficult to find.

However, if a superintendent and school board are committed to it, line items can be

adjusted to have resources for an ongoing training. A long term vision for professional

development as well as consistent long term leadership at the superintendent level is

important to moving teacher and staff forward towards new learning strategies.

Removing Obstacles so Teachers
Can Teach Without Distractions

This may be the most important task for a superintendent. If a superintendent

believes that their primary role is removing obstacles for teachers, the superintendent

becomes an ally of teachers rather than an adversary. Many times superintendents are

hired to clean up problems in a district. They are hired to deal with the union or balance a budget. Unfortunately, after 2 or 3 years of serving in this capacity, they are "bought out" or non-renewed and the district is looking for a new superintendent. Sometimes, dealing with a union or balancing a budget is necessary. However, completing these tasks should be with the focus that the whole will be better and obstacles removed so better instruction can occur. Long term leadership in the superintendent role is critical because developing trust within the community and school board takes time. Trust within the school community is an important factor in removing obstacles and longevity in leadership may cultivate trust over time.

Consistency and Stability through Supportive
<u>School Board and Supportive Community</u>

A supportive school board and community is created by the superintendent's relationship with the board and community, and this is built over time. This finding coincides with current literature. Atherton (2008) found several factors and behaviors that caused the superintendent to remain in the district for so long The factors included the size of the school district, established faculty and other personnel relationships and the fact that the school community shows appreciation for the superintendents efforts. Another important factor was that the school board described the superintendent as a "good fit" and gave regular positive feedback and evaluations (Atherton 2008).

Johnson (2005) found that superintendents who were accessible and worked to build close relationships to the community, respected local traditions and maintained transparency in their governance style tended to stay in the position longer than those that

did not. This study cites the importance of building connections with community

members and other district stakeholders such as teachers and parents. Extended tenure

for superintendents was partially attributed to the understanding and connection to the

community (Johnson, 2005). According to Blanco, (2009) superintendents report that

board relationships are a continuing issue despite the literature that espouses that the

board's role is policy setting and the superintendent's role is execution of the policies.

"The political reality is that superintendents must be skilled in strategies to gain support

for their recommendations. In relation to community, gaining an understanding of how

to develop meaningful family and community partnerships is critical in advancing the

district's vision. The involvement of stakeholder groups in the development of the

district's strategic plan and community forums has proved to be successful in fostering

positive relationships" (Blanco, 2009, p. 218). In a recent study completed by Kemp

(2011), the successful tenure of a superintendent is closely related to the relationships that

are established with each individual board member and with the board as a whole.

> In the current high stakes educational environment, superintendents cannot
> expect that school boards will blindly accept recommendations by the
> superintendent. Effective superintendents, those who have invested in
> working with the board, understand the needs of each board member and
> can effectively manage these relationships to avoid undue scrutiny when
> presenting initiatives for the board's approval. (Kemp, 2011, p 143)

> According to Thompson (2010), a district's educational governance team
> decision-making processes can influence district climate and impact
> student achievement. "Boards and superintendents that work to prioritize
> student needs and student learning and make decisions and implement
> policy that supports enabling district structures, have the power to greatly
> enhance and accelerate student achievement. (Thompson, 2010. p. 134)

Good hiring and promoting in-service training so teachers deliver quality education to students may promote school board and community support because trust is built between the school board, the community and the school. Once this trust and support is established, obstacles are removed so teachers can deliver sound instruction; political obstacles are removed, financial obstacles are removed and perhaps the most disruptive of all, the frequent turnover of a superintendent is removed. In the current study, a supportive school board and community was the primary reason that the superintendent stayed in the school district. This support did not come overnight and all three superintendents had garnered support in a variety of different ways.

Since superintendent contracts are limited to a maximum of 3 years, this support is critical if the superintendent has a family and wants to keep them in the same school throughout their education. It also effects family by the way children and spouses are treated in the school and community. Poor treatment of family due to political problems in the district may have a negative effect on the psyche of a superintendent and his ability to effectively complete his job tasks.

Demographics

Demographics may play a role in the implications of this study. All three districts were small, 1000 students or less, however, the Buffalo and Open Prairie districts could be considered better funded schools due to economics. The Buffalo District borders a national park and is provided subsidies from the federal government due to the presence of this park. The Open Prairie District has a significant tax base due to property in the district which includes a ski resort and multimillion dollar homes. These values

substantially increase the taxable valuation of the district. This increased valuation

allows the district to levy a greater amount of taxes without a big impact to the local

taxpayer.

The free and reduced student population in both the Buffalo and Open Prairie

districts is considerably less than the Alpine District, which approaches 72%. In the

Alpine district, the economy is stagnant primarily due to a downturn in the timber

industry. Therefore, with limited job opportunities, the free and reduced student

population has increased over the last 10 years. The Buffalo and Open Prairie districts

had the greatest gain in student test scores at 24 and 23 percentile net gains in reading and

math, respectively. The Alpine district had a 13 percentile net gain in reading and math.

The challenges in Alpine as opposed to Buffalo and Open Prairie may have a direct

correlation to the poverty level of students and the economy within those communities.

Applications of Systems

The Buffalo School District and the Alpine School District utilized system wide

thinking to a very high degree. In system wide thinking, change is accomplished by

different departments and individuals within the school system working together on a

project that is related in nature. In the Buffalo School District, the system that was

utilized primarily was the Response to Intervention (RTI) program. This program was

central to the success of students in the opinion of school board members, administrators

and teachers and was supported by professional development, time and resources.

Although primarily centered at the elementary level, teachers and students at all levels

benefited from this program. In the Alpine School District, a number of system wide

programs were supported by a wide variety of entities in the school district. The Love and Logic program was a foundational program at all levels. All current staff and new staff are sent to training for this program. Many staff credit this program as fundamental in change efforts in student relationships and behavior. The Learning Cube was another program that was implemented and supported district wide. A large majority of participants credited this program for changing the way instruction was delivered. These programs were supported by professional development, time and resources. Both districts also used human systems thinking which emphasizes people's roles and relationships within the organization.

In the Open Prairie District, a specific system as described by Senge et al. (2000) was not apparent. Although programs such as the RTI and Advanced Placement classes were being used, system wide efforts were not as prevalent as the other two districts. The strength of this district came in the form of the superintendent's vision for the school district and hiring and maintaining quality teachers. Human systems were utilized, however, not to the degree as in the Buffalo and Alpine District.

Fullan (2010) outlined 5 areas where schools should concentrate energy on in order to improve school systems; moral purpose/high expectations, individual capacity, collective capacity, intelligent accountability and resolute leadership.

In all three school districts, moral purpose was a central theme of their efforts. Teachers expressed the desire to raise the bar, close the gap and establish high standards for their students. This was particularly strong in the Alpine District where the free and reduced student count exceeded 70%.

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Superintendents particularly in the Open Prairie and Alpine Districts exhibited resolute leadership. This may have a connection to the fact that both superintendents had been in their school districts twice as long as the superintendent in the Buffalo District. Perhaps the strongest example of resolute leadership was found in the Alpine District. Superintendent Timber used a leadership team to guide goal setting and professional development plans in the district. He also spent a great deal of time and resources providing training to his school board. He was described as an academic leader and worked diligently to stay current on the latest developments in education. Once a direction was agreed upon, time and resources were allotted to move this idea forward.

Intelligent accountability was found to be most prevalent in the Buffalo and Alpine Districts. There was a great amount of "buy in" for the RTI program in the Buffalo District. This program is central to the school's success and was highly internalized by the elementary staff. Superintendent Antelope provided unlimited support for this program.

In the Alpine District, the Love and Logic program was internalized by teachers and supported by the superintendent. Teachers and staff were sent to training in this program as well as presenters being brought in.

Collective capacity was most prevalent in the Alpine School District. Superintendent Timber established a coalition that represented all levels in the district to serve on the district leadership team. As a result of this coalition, cooperation from several decision making entities promoted knowledge and commitment among teachers which enhanced strong instruction for students.

Finally, all three superintendents engaged in individual capacity as one of the central focuses was hiring and maintaining high quality educators. This process of hiring effective teachers and working to remove weak teachers was more prevalent in the Open Prairie and Alpine Districts. Again, this maybe a result of the fact that these superintendents had been in their district twice as longas the superintendent in the Buffalo School District.

Leadership Theory

Burns (1978) was one of the first researchers to develop the term transformational leadership. In this study, the best example of transformational leadership could be found in the Alpine School District. Superintendent Timber was a central figure in the district and through his efforts over many years certainly has increased the level of motivation and morality in teachers, principals and school board members. He was described as a father figure in the district and a person that genuinely cared for the educational process and the success of students. The school district and its success was described as being central to who he was as person. He was described as a person with academic ideas and because of the support base he had secured with the school board and community, if you heard an idea 3 times or more from the superintendent, it was probably going to happen. This transformation came in a school that once had a vibrant healthy economy to one that now serves over 70% free and reduced student population.

Recent Literature in Relation to This Study

In recent studies concerning the influence of superintendent longevity and student achievement, studies have told us that there is a relationship, but few have revealed what that relationship is and how it occurs. As has been discussed, studies have found that there is a positive correlation between superintendent longevity and student achievement. Indications of the study revealed that this positive influence may take effect in as little as two years (Waters and Marzano, 2006). Metcalfe (2008) found a statistically significant difference between student achievement and superintendent tenure. Metcalfe found that there is a relationship between a superintendent's length of service and the increase or decrease in student achievement but the study did not reveal why (Metcalfe, 2008). Myers (2011), concluded that the length of a superintendent's tenure was shown to significantly impact the outcome of the dependent variable at the .05 level. Of the four predictive variable used in the study, superintendent tenure had the fourth strongest effect on the dependent variable, student achievement. Myers also concluded that the total number of years' experience as a superintendent was shown to significantly impact the outcome variable at the .05 level. Of the four predictive variables used to in this study, years of experience as a superintendent had the third strongest effect on the dependent variable, student achievement (Myers, 2011).

Jacobs (2010) found that the impact of a superintendent's leadership may vary depending on the size of the school district and the length of tenure. In analyzing districts of 5 different sizes of districts in Texas schools, Jacobs found that superintendents that had been in a school district for three years, the increase in mean

student scores on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) was statistically significant and schools in the study outperformed all other schools in the state. Although this study does not tie superintendent longevity directly to the these mean increases, schools experienced their greatest increase in TAKS scores during this 3 year tenure.

In all of these studies, even though links between superintendent longevity and student achievement were found, none of these studies revealed how superintendent longevity influences student achievement.

<u>Recommendations for Further Research</u>

This study focused on school districts that had superintendents with 8 or more years of service in a school district and had significant gains in student achievement. In the original sample of 20 superintendents in this study, only 9 districts showed positive longitudinal gains in student scores. Further research could be completed in districts that that had more than average superintendent longevity, but where student achievement was not improving. What characteristics do these superintendents possess that the ones in this study did not?

Another line of research may be the study of school districts that have high student achievement, but have superintendents that have served less than the national average. What characteristics do these superintendent possess that the ones in this study did not?

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In addition, since this study focused on small school districts, less than 1000 students K-12, research replication of this study could be completed in large districts to see if findings are similar.

Additional study could also be completed in analyzing the correlation between school board longevity and student achievement as well as principal longevity and student achievement. School districts could be analyzed that have significant longevity at the board level, the principal level and the superintendent level to see how student achievement has been influenced over a longitudinal period.

Finally, this study could be used as a baseline to create quantitative studies using surveys to collect similar data. This process could allow researchers to analyze much larger school districts with greater ease.

Final Summary

This study used a qualitative multi case design to answer the following questions;

1. How does superintendent longevity provide a context through programs, relationships and culture that supports and enhances student achievement in schools?

2. How do local conditions influence longevity of a superintendent?

The theoretical base for this study was systems theory and transformational leadership theory. Researchers providing the foundation for these areas are among others Senge et al. (2000) in systems theory and Burns (1978) in leadership theory. In order to answer the research questions for this study, a sample of Montana School superintendents

was determined. This sample was collected from the population of Montana public

school superintendents that are currently employed in school districts that have an

elementary and high school served by one superintendent. To determine the length of

service to be used in the sample, national averages were analyzed. Nationally, the

average tenure of a school superintendent ranges from 2.75 years for urban

superintendents (Council of Great City Schools, 2000), to 6 to 7 years for the average of

all superintendents (Natkin, Cooper, Alborano, Padilla, & Ghosh, 2002). After

reviewing this information, the length of service for this study was established at 8 years.

This exceeds the national average by 1 year. Darrell Rud, Executive Director of the

School Administrators of Montana provided superintendent longevity data for the

2010/11 school year. According to this data, as of the 2010/11 school year, 25 schools

employed superintendents for 8 years or longer (Darrell Rud, 2011). This group of 25

schools became the sample for the study.

Public data on student achievement was accessed from the Montana Office of

Public Instruction. Longitudinal student performance data from the MontCas statewide

assessment instrument was collected and matched to each superintendent who was

included in the initial sample. Once this data was analyzed, a new sample was

established. This new sample included three school districts with superintendents that

have been in the district 8 years or longer and whose students showed increased

performance from 2006 to 2010. This growth established a foundation to analyze

whether or not superintendent longevity provided a context through programs,

relationships and culture that supports and enhances student achievement and how local

conditions influence longevity.

For each school district selected to be in the study, onsite interviews, observations

and document reviews were conducted. Interviews were conducted with the

superintendent, principals, teachers and school board members. Similar questions were

asked of all participants in order to gain a different perspective and to determine what

common themes emerged from the data. Data from these interviews was analyzed to

determine if there were common themes that were prevalent from district to district.

<u>Buffalo School District</u>

Theme 1 – Goals are derived from data analysis driven from staff in collaboration

with administration.

Theme 2 – Student achievement has increased due to hiring and maintaining good

teachers and moving out weak teachers. These teachers are of high caliber who work

well together, has pride, high expectations and compassion for the student body.

Theme 3 – Student achievement has increased due to the Response to Intervention

Program.

Theme 4 – Superintendent longevity has influenced student achievement through

good leadership, support for professional development, financial support and support of

ideas through his role as instructional leader.

Theme 5 – The conditions within the community that promote the

superintendent's longevity are the fact that it is a good community to raise a family, the

superintendent likes the school and the school board has supported the superintendent through an extended contract.

Open Prairie School District

Theme 1 – District wide goals are set by the superintendent who presents goals to the school board and once adopted are universally supported in the district.

Theme 2 – Student achievement has increased due to autonomy and support given to principals from the superintendent and teachers working together promote achievement.

Theme 3 – Superintendent longevity has influenced student achievement through the superintendent's involvement in hiring and maintaining good teachers and moving out weak teachers.

Theme 4 – Superintendent longevity has influenced student achievement by the superintendent's consistency, his support for professional development and the opportunity to carry out his vision for the school.

Theme 5 - The conditions within the community that promote the superintendents longevity are a financially sound, supportive community and school board that bought in to the superintendent's vision.

Alpine School District

Theme 1 – Goals are established in cooperation with teachers through the utilization of a district leadership team and are formally adopted and supported by the school board.

Theme 2 – Student achievement gains are the result of efforts of a veteran staff who analyze a wide variety of data.

Theme 3 – Student achievement gains are enhanced by a strong and comprehensive professional development program that trains teachers in the use of a variety of researched base instructional strategies that enables a teacher to better engage students in a caring and respectful manner in order to obtain quality learning.

Theme 4 – Superintendent longevity has influenced student achievement through the hiring process, support for veteran teachers and resource alignment for professional development.

Theme 5 - The conditions within the community that promote the superintendents longevity are the support of a well-trained and veteran school board as well as a supportive and "hands off" community.

Cross case analysis was conducted and as a result, the following common themes were found.

Common Themes

1. All districts use data analysis to determine instructional improvement goals.

2. In all districts, once goals are set in the district, they are generally supported at all levels.

3. In all districts, superintendents are involved in the hiring and maintaining good teachers and staff.

4. In all districts, professional development is a key component in each school district.

5. In all districts, superintendents cited a supportive board and community as the primary reason they stayed in the school district.

This data revealed that superintendents in these districts focused on goals, hiring, professional development and cultivating a supportive board and community. However, each superintendent approached these areas differently. For example, in the Buffalo School District, goal setting was not driven by the board or superintendent, but was driven by teacher ideas and then support was given. In the Open Prairie District, goals were set by the superintendent, given to the board for endorsement, and then principals and teachers went about implementing them. In the Alpine District, even though the superintendent's ideas were clearly at the center of the goals, through the district leadership team and a school board that enjoyed debating goals, there seemed to be a greater awareness of goals among teachers and administrators and these goals were central to all school improvement efforts.

All districts put a big emphasis on hiring and it was evident that superintendents that had more longevity believed that they had people on their staff that reflected the superintendents' beliefs. In the Buffalo District, the superintendent had only been in the district for 8 years and the majority of the staff had been hired by the previous superintendent. There was also emphasis on either improving the quality of teachers once they had been hired, or working to dismiss the teacher; although dismissal of weak teachers was a priority with the Open Prairie superintendent.

All districts took different approaches to professional development. In the Buffalo and Open Prairie Districts, professional development was more centered around

teacher ideas and not driven by a district wide effort that starts with school improvement goals and supported with financial resources. The Alpine District was much more prescriptive with professional development. The training was supported by substantial funding and staff involved in the improvement effort were required to complete the training.

All three districts provided evidence of cultivating a strong school board and community support. However, this support from both groups seemed more evident from superintendents with the most longevity (Open Prairie and Alpine Districts). Perhaps the amount of time these superintendents had been in the districts had an influence on this support and perhaps the understanding of the importance of this support prompted them to put more emphasis on activities that would provide support.

This study established 4 findings. Finding 1 2 and 3 answered research question 1 and finding 4 answered research questions 2.

Finding 1

Superintendent longevity supports and enhances student achievement by the superintendent's involvement in hiring and retention of good teachers in a consistent manner over many years.

Finding 2

Superintendent longevity supports and enhances student achievement by the superintendent supporting and providing consistent resources for professional development over many years.

Finding 3

Superintendent longevity supports and enhances student achievement by the superintendent removing obstacles so teachers can teach without distractions. This includes efforts to foster a supportive school board and supportive community and takes time to cultivate.

Finding 4

Local conditions influence the longevity of a superintendent through consistency and stability created by a supportive school board and supportive community that has been cultivated over many years.

According to Murphy (2009),

In order for a superintendent's reforms to have a chance to succeed, he or she must be in office for a reasonable period of time. It is not possible to see the results of many reforms implemented during the average tenure of a superintendent. Much care should be taken when considering the termination of a superintendent's contract. Running a school district and developing policy is incredibly complex. Training for board members in all aspects of education, from legislation to budget to data-analysis to pedagogy to communication and team-building is crucial. Much of the work and the success of a superintendent hinges on his or her relationship and communication with the members of the board of education. Frequent changes in elected or appointed school board membership can be detrimental to maintaining a clear focus on the needs of students and staff, and may derail progress. (Murphy, 2009, p. 163)

From previous studies, we knew that there was a link between superintendent longevity and student achievement, but we had very little data that described what this link was. In previous studies, there was limited data regarding what local conditions contributed to superintendent longevity in the district. This study provides us with answers to these important questions. It provides school board members and

superintendents with empirical data that clearly shows that superintendent longevity does

have an influence on student achievement. The school superintendency is a complex job.

Not only is the superintendent responsible for the academic future of students, they are

also the CEO of a complex organization. If superintendents are not feeling threatened or

challenged every step of the way by the public or school board, they then have the ability

to spend more time on what really matters; student achievement.

> If your funding is secure and you are not scared every fiscal year whether
> or not you are going to be broke or panic about losing his job because the
> board is on his back, I think that allows him (the superintendent) to free
> his time and focus on what is really important; to make sure our academics
> are increasing every year. (Daniel Badger, Board Member, October 2011)

School boards and communities should consider the ramifications of frequent

turnover of their superintendent, because in terms of student achievement, superintendent

longevity does matter.

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APPENDICES

<u>APPENDIX A</u>

APPROVED INFORMED CONSENT

APPROVED INFORMED CONSENT

Participant Consent Form for Participation in Human Research at Montana State University

Project Title: **Superintendent Longevity in Relation to Student Achievement in Montana School Districts**

You are invited to participate in a research study to determine the link between superintendent longevity and student achievement in Montana Schools. If you agree, you will be asked to participate in an interview with the researcher which will last between 30 and 60 minutes. The specific aim of the interview is to determine your opinion about above topic as well as any additional issues related to student achievement in your school district. You will also be asked about local conditions that have contributed to superintendent longevity in your school district.

Risks and Benefits: The risks of this study are minimal. The nature of the data is not especially sensitive and the interview will not cover topics that may invoke embarrassment of personnel or legal risks. There are no direct benefits to you, however, the results of the study may lead to a deeper understanding of superintendent influences on student achievement and how local conditions influence superintendent longevity.

Time Involvement: Your participation in this research study will take between 30 and 90 minutes. There may also be a need for follow up questions to check facts or to verify the information gathered from you.

Confidentiality: Your name, school district and contact information will be strictly confidential and will not be included in the study. Only your title, will be identified in the study; for example, school board member, teacher, or superintendent.

Participant Rights: Your participation in completely voluntary. You are free not to answer any questions you may find objectionable and may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty just by letting the researcher know that you would like to discontinue your involvement. This research has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board at Montana State University. If you have questions or concerns about this research project, you may contact the researcher, Daniel B. Sybrant, 557 Cow Creek Lane, Corvallis Montana 59828; 406-381-0921, sybrant8@q.com. If you have any additional questions about the rights of human subjects, please contact the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Mark Quinn; 406- 994- 4707.

If you agree to participate in this interview, please sign below and mail the signed document to Daniel B. Sybrant, 557 Cow Creek Lane, Corvallis Montana 59828. (Please keep a copy for yourself). **Authorization**: I have read the above and understand the discomforts, inconvenience and risk of this study. I,

_____, agree to participate in this research. I understand that I may later refuse to participate and that I may withdraw from the study at any time. I have received a copy of this consent form for my own records.

Signed: _____Date: _____

Investigator: _____Date: _____

APPENDIX B

SAMPLE LETTER TO SUPERINTENDENTS REGARDING STUDY

SAMPLE LETTER TO SUPERINTENDENTS REGARDING STUDY

September 22, 2011

Mr………….
Superintendent
………..Schools
Box
………..Montana 59729

Dear …………….:

   I hope all is well with you and you are having a great school year.   It was a pleasure
to talk with you last week and I really appreciate the opportunity to include you and your
district in my doctoral dissertation study.   As a follow up to our conversation, on
September 12th, my doctoral committee approved me to move forward with collection of
data for my dissertation this fall. My study is entitled **Superintendent Longevity in
Relation to Student Achievement in Montana School Districts** and will be a multiple
case qualitative research study**.** As a result of my analysis of 25 Montana superintendents
with 8 or more years of experience in one school district in Montana, your district was
selected along with two other districts due to substantial student gains in proficient and
advanced CRT scores from 2006 through 2010.
   I would like to come onsite to your school district in mid to late October for 3 to 5
days. During my visit, I would like to interview you, any willing teacher that has been in
the school district for 8 or more years and any willing school board member that has been
on the school board for three or more years. Interviews will last between 30 to 90
minutes. I would also like to review any pertinent school district documents that relate to
school improvement. There may also be a need for follow up questions to check facts or
to verify the information gathered from interviews. The specific aim of the interviews is
to determine links between superintendent longevity and student achievement as well as
any additional issues related to student achievement in your school district. I am also
interested in learning about local conditions that have contributed to superintendent
longevity in your school district.
       The risks of this study are minimal. The nature of the data is not especially
sensitive and the interviews will not cover topics that may invoke embarrassment of
personnel or legal risks. There are no direct benefits to you or your district, however, the
results of the study may lead to a deeper understanding of superintendent influences on
student achievement and how local conditions influence superintendent longevity. The
name of your school district, names of participants and contact information will be
strictly confidential and will not be included in the study. Only titles will be indentified,
for example, school board member, teacher, or superintendent. If participants are willing,
I would like to audiotape the interviews. Names of persons being interviewed will not be
identified on the audio tapes and will be coded as a number rather than a name. Coding

logs and tape recordings will remain in the possession of the researcher in a locked file cabinet and will be used for transcription purposes.

Participation in the study is completely voluntary. Participants are free not to answer any questions they may find objectionable and may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty just by letting me know.

My goal is to collect data on all three districts selected for the study in October and early November and submit a draft of my dissertation to my committee by February 1st 2012.

I hope this has helped answer any questions you might have had. If you have any more questions, please call me at 406 381 0921 or email me at sybrant8@q.com. I will be in touch in the near future to find a time to come on site.

Thank you again.

Sincerely

Daniel B. Sybrant
557 Cow Creek Lane
Corvallis Montana 59828
406 381 0921
sybrant8@q.com

<u>APPENDIX C</u>

SAMPLE LETTER TO PERSONNEL REGARDING STUDY

SAMPLE LETTER TO PERSONNEL REGARDING STUDY

………. Public Schools

Principals, Teachers and School Board Members

Via Email October 7, 2011

Dear Colleagues

    As a way of introduction, my name is Daniel Sybrant and I am a third year doctoral student at Montana State University. On September 12th, my doctoral committee approved me to move forward with collection of data for my dissertation this fall. My study is entitled **Superintendent Longevity in Relation to Student Achievement in Montana School Districts** and will be a multiple case qualitative research study**.** As a result of my analysis of 25 Montana superintendents with 8 or more years of experience in one school district in Montana, the ………School District was selected along with two other districts to be included in my study due to substantial student gains in proficient and advanced CRT scores from 2006 through 2010.

    I will be in your district to collect data the **week of October 24th.** During my visit, I will be interviewing your superintendent, any willing principal, any willing teacher that has been in the school district for 8 or more years and any willing school board member that has been on the school board for 3 or more years. Interviews will last between 30 to 90 minutes. There may also be a need for follow up questions to check facts or to verify the information gathered from interviews. The specific aim of the interviews is to determine links between superintendent longevity and student achievement as well as any additional issues related to student achievement in your school district. I am also interested in learning about local conditions that have contributed to superintendent longevity in your school district.

       The risks of this study are minimal. The nature of the data is not especially sensitive and the interviews will not cover topics that may invoke embarrassment of personnel or legal risks. There are no direct benefits to you or your district, however, the

results of the study may lead to a deeper understanding of superintendent influences on student achievement and how local conditions influence superintendent longevity. The name of your school district, names of participants and contact information will be strictly confidential and will not be included in the study. Only titles will be indentified, for example, school board member, teacher, or superintendent. If you are willing, I would like to audiotape the interviews. Names of persons being interviewed will not be identified on the audio tapes and will be coded as a number rather than a name. Coding logs and tape recordings will remain in the possession of the researcher in a locked file cabinet and will be used for transcription purposes.

   Participation in the study is completely voluntary. Participants are free not to answer any questions they may find objectionable and may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty just by letting me know.

   . **If you are willing to be interviewed, please email me directly at sybrant8@q.com or let your district office know so we can work out a time. I look forward to meeting you during the week of the 24th.**

 If you have any questions, please call me at 406 381 0921 or email me at sybrant8@q.com. Thank you again and I look forward to working with you

Sincerely

Daniel B. Sybrant

557 Cow Creek Lane

Corvallis Montana 59828

406 381 0921

sybrant8@q.com

APPENDIX D

SAMPLE LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS
REGARDING REVIEW OF TRANSCRIPTS

SAMPLE LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS REGARDING REVIEW OF TRANSCRIPTS

November 9, 2011

Dear

Thank you for taking the time to be interviewed for my doctoral study. I have enclosed a

general summary of your statements during the interview. This summary is not verbatim,

but contains general comments you made in direct reference to the primary questions in

the study.

Please review these comments, make any changes you feel are appropriate, sign the

declaration statement on the last page and return the whole document to me in the self

addressed stamped envelope. As I said in the interview process, these transcripts are for

my internal use only so don't worry about editing.

If you have any questions, feel free to call me at 406 381 0921 or email me at

sybrant8@q.com.

Thank you again for your cooperation.

Daniel Sybrant

557 Cow Creek Lane

Corvallis Montana 59828

APPENDIX E

SAMPLE EMAIL TO SUPERINTENDENTS
REGARDING THEME REVIEW

SAMPLE EMAIL TO SUPERINTENDENTS REGARDING THEME REVIEW

January 17, 2012

Superintendent…………..

I hope all is well and you are having a good start of the new year. I have attached themes that have developed as a result of data analysis of your school district for my dissertation. Please review these themes and provide any comments you have. I am interested if you believe that the themes portray your district as you see it. You can email me at sybrant8@q.com or you can call me at 381 0921.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Thanks

Daniel Sybrant

APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Superintendent Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about your background.

   - Educational Background

   - Work Background

   - Family

   - Years in this position

2. Tell me about the school and community that you currently serve in?

   - Local demographics of the community

   - Size of school

   - Number of students

   - Number of teachers

   - Makeup of school board

   - Longevity of school board

   - Unique qualities of the community

3. How are goals established in this district and what is your involvement in the process?

   - Importance of goals

   - Instructional goals

   - Non Instructional goals

   - When are goals established

   - School board involvement

   - Teacher involvement

- Community involvement

- Support of goals by school board

- Support of goals by teaching staff

- Alignment of goals to instruction

- Alignment of resources to goals

- Evaluation of goals

- Has your longevity been a contributing factor in goals

4. Do you have a school improvement process in your district?

- What is it

- Who is involved

- Is it tied to the goals

- If it is tied to the goals, how

- How is it measured

- What is your role in the improvement process

- Has it contributed to achievement gains/if so, how

- Has your longevity been a contributing factor in school improvement

5. Why has student achievement increased in your school district?

- Who has contributed

- Goals

- School improvement plan

- School Board

- Resource alignment

- Principals roles

- Superintendent role with principals

- Autonomy level of principals

- Monitoring of school goals by superintendent

- Monitoring of school goals by principals

- Collective efficacy

- Your influenced on student achievement

- Specific steps have been taken to increase achievement

- Has longevity influenced student achievement/if so how

6. Why have you stayed in this district for as long as you have?

- Relationship building with community

- Communication style

- Visibility in community

- Transparency in governance style

- Understanding and respecting local traditions

- The relationship between ethics, advocacy and community relations

- Relationship with the school board president

- Relationships with the school board

- Longevity of the school board

- Salary and Benefits

7. What conditions within the community have promoted your longevity?

- Community makeup

- Fit within the community

- Support level of schools in the community

- Support and acceptance of your family within the community

- Your children's education

- Children and spouse involvement in community

Principal Interview Protocol

Each principal in the district was interviewed in this study. Each interview began with open ended questions intended to get to know the participant and make them feel at ease. Questions were followed up on as needed and clarification sought from each participant as necessary. What follows is interview protocol and prompts for the principals only.

1. Tell me about your background.

- Educational Background

- Work Background

- Family

- Years in this position

2. What is your involvement in the process of goal setting in this district?

- Importance of goals

- Instructional goals

- Non Instructional goals

- When are goals established

- School board involvement

- Superintendent involvement

- Teacher involvement

- Community involvement

- Support of goals by school board

- Support of goals by superintendent

- Support of goals by teaching staff

- Alignment of goals to instruction

- Alignment of resources to goals

- Evaluation of goals

4. Describe your school improvement process in your district and your involvement in it?

- What is it

- Who is involved

- Is it tied to the goals

- If it is tied to the goals, how

- How is it measured

- What is your role in the improvement process

- Has it contributed to achievement gains/if so, how

5. Why has student achievement increased in your school district?

- Who has contributed

- Goals

- School improvement plan

- School Board

- Superintendent

- Resource alignment

- Your role in achievement gains

- The superintendent's role in achievement gains

- Superintendent support of principals

- Autonomy granted by the superintendent to principals

- Monitoring of school goals by superintendent

- Monitoring of school goals by principals

- Collective efficacy

- Have you influenced achievement

- If so, what specific steps have been taken to increase achievement

- Has the superintendent contributed to gains in student achievement and if so how

- Has the superintendent's longevity in the district contributed to gains in student achievement and if so how

6. The superintendent has been in this school district for a number of years. Why do you think he has stayed in for as long as he has?

- Relationship building with community

- Communication style

- Visibility in community

- Transparency in governance style

- Understanding and respecting local traditions

- The relationship between ethics, advocacy and community relations

- Relationship with the school board president

- Relationships with the school board

- Longevity of the school board

7. What conditions within the community has promoted the superintendent's longevity?

- Community makeup

- Fit within the community

- Support level of schools in the community

Teacher Interview Protocol

Teachers that have been in the district for 8 years or longer were targeted for interviews. The rationale for this grouping was that the population of superintendents for this study was superintendents that have served in a district for 8 years or more which exceeds the national average. By using teachers with similar tenure, these teachers would have spent at least 8 years with this superintendent and would have a better knowledge of his governance practices. Each interview began with open ended questions intended to get to know the participant and make them feel at ease. Questions were followed up on as needed and clarification sought from each participant if necessary. What follows is interview protocol and prompts for the teachers only.

1. Tell me about your background.

- Educational Background

- Work Background

- Family

- Years in this position

2. What is your involvement in the process of goal setting in this district?

- Importance of goals

- Instructional goals

- Non Instructional goals

- When are goals established

- School board involvement

- Superintendent involvement

- Principal involvement

- Teacher involvement

- Community involvement

- Support of goals by school board

- Support of goals by superintendent

- Support of goals by principal

- Support of goals by teaching staff

- Alignment of goals to instruction

- Alignment of resources to goals

- Evaluation of goals

4. Describe your school improvement process in your district and your involvement in it?

- What is it

- Who is involved

- Is it tied to the goals

- If it is tied to the goals, how

- How is it measured

- What is your role in the improvement process

- Has the school improvement process contributed to achievement gains/if so, how

5. Why has student achievement increased in your school district?

- Who has contributed

- Goals

- School improvement plan

- School Board

- Resource alignment

- Your role in achievement gains

- The superintendent's role in achievement gains

- The principal's role in achievement gains

- Monitoring of school goals by superintendent

- Monitoring of school goals by principals

- Have you influenced achievement

- If so, what specific steps have been taken to increase achievement

- Has the superintendent contributed to gains in student achievement and if so how

- Has the superintendent's longevity in the district contributed to gains in student achievement and if so how

6. The superintendent has been in this school district for a number of years. Why do you think he has stayed in for as long as he has?

- Relationship building with community

- Communication style

- Visibility in community

- Transparency in governance style

- Understanding and respecting local traditions

- The relationship between ethics, advocacy and community relations

- Relationship with the school board president

- Relationships with the school board

- Longevity of the school board

7. What conditions within the community has promoted the superintendent's longevity?

- Community makeup

- Fit within the community

- Support level of schools in the community

School Board Interview Protocol

School Board members that had been in the district for 3 years or longer were targeted for interviews. The rationale for this is that the school board member interviewed would have served at least one term with the current superintendent. This amount of time would provide a knowledge base for the school board member to comment on the questions. Each interview began with open ended questions intended to get to know the participant and make them feel at ease. Questions were followed up on as needed and

clarification sought from each participant if necessary. What follows is interview

protocol and prompts for school board members only.

1. Tell me about your background, how long have you served on the school board and

why is it important for you to serve.

- Educational Background

- Work Background

- Family

- Years in this position

2. What is your involvement in the process of goal setting in this district?

- Importance of goals

- Instructional goals

- Non Instructional goals

- When are goals established

- Superintendent involvement

- Principal involvement

- Teacher involvement

- Community involvement

- Support of goals by school board

- Support of goals by administration and teaching staff

- Alignment of goals to instruction

- Alignment of resources to goals

- Evaluation of goals

4. Why has student achievement increased in your school district?

- Who has contributed

- Goals

- School improvement plan

- School Board support

- Resource alignment

- The superintendent's role in achievement gains

- The principal's role in achievement gains

- Teachers roles in achievement gains

- Has the superintendent contributed to gains in student achievement and if so how

- Has the superintendent's longevity in the district contributed to gains in student achievement and if so how

5. The superintendent has been in this school district for a number of years. Why do you think he has stayed in for as long as he has?

- Relationship building with community

- Communication style

- Visibility in community

- Transparency in governance style

- Understanding and respecting local traditions

- The relationship between ethics, advocacy and community relations

- Relationship with the school board president

- Relationships with the school board

- Longevity of the school board

7. What conditions within the community has promoted the superintendent's longevity?

- Community makeup

- Fit within the community

- Support level of schools in the community

APPENDIX G

DOCUMENT REVIEW PROTOCOL

DOCUMENT REVIEW PROTOCOL

Document Review Protocol

Document review was a part of this study. Documents that provided support to the research

questions in this study were requested to be reviewed. The following documents were

requested for review.

1. Demographic information about the community

2. Demographic information about the school

3. Minutes of school board meetings where district goals are discussed and adopted.

4. Minutes of administrative meetings where district goals are discussed.

5. Minutes of faculty meetings where district goals are discussed.

6. The district's 5 year educational improvement plan.

7. The district's school improvement plan for regional accreditation if applicable.

8. Samples of superintendent communication with the community.

9. Samples of superintendent communication with the school board.

10. Samples of superintendent communication with principals

11. Samples of superintendent communication with teachers.

APPENDIX H

TABLE OF SPECIFICATIONS

TABLE OF SPECIFICATIONS

Table of Specifications

Research	Interview Questions
Question 1 How does superintendent longevity provide a context through programs, relationships and culture that supports and enhances student achievement in Montana Schools?	3. How are goals established in this district and what is your involvement in the process? • Importance of goals • Instructional goals • Non Instructional goals • When are goals established • School board involvement • Teacher involvement • Community involvement • Support of goals by school board • Support of goals by teaching staff • Alignment of goals to instruction • Alignment of resources to goals • Evaluation of goals • Has your longevity been a contributing factor in goals 4. Do you have a school improvement process in your district? • What is it • Who is involved • Is it tied to the goals • If it is tied to the goals, how • How is it measured • What is your role in the improvement process • Has it contributed to achievement gains/if so, how • Has your longevity been a contributing factor in school improvement

5. Why has student achievement increased in your school district?

- Who has contributed
- Goals
- School improvement plan
- School Board
- Resource alignment
- Principals roles
- Superintendent role with principals
- Autonomy level of principals
- Monitoring of school goals by superintendent
- Monitoring of school goals by principals
- Collective efficacy
- Have you influenced achievement
- If so, what specific steps have been taken to increase achievement
- Has your longevity influenced student achievement/if so how

Research	Interview Questions
Question 2 How do local conditions influence longevity of the superintendent?	6. Why has the superintendent stayed in this district for as long as he has? - Relationship building with community - Communication style - Visibility in community - Transparency in governance style - Understanding and respecting local traditions - The relationship between ethics, advocacy and community relations - Relationship with the school board president

- Relationships with the school board
- Longevity of the school board
- Salary and Benefits

7. What conditions within the community have promoted his longevity?

- Community makeup
- Fit within the community
- Support level of schools in the community
- Support and acceptance of your family within the community
- Your children's education
- Children and spouse involvement in community