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KENTUCKY'S SUPERINTENDENT INDUCTION PROGRAM:
PARTICIPANTS' PERCEPTIONS OF COMPETENCY AND LONGEVITY

By

Robert L. Smith
B.S., Northern Kentucky University, 1995
M.Ed., Northern Kentucky University, 1999

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Education and Human Development at the University of Louisville
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Leadership and Organizational Development

Department of Educational Leadership, Evaluation, and Organizational Development
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

May 2019

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A Dissertation Approved on

April 13, 2019

By the following Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Kyle Ingle, Chair

Dr. Harrie Buecker

Dr. Blake Haselton

Dr. Amy Lingo

DEDICATION

To my dad, who did the best he could. Even after his death, I try to make him proud.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Kyle Ingle for his guidance throughout this process. Dr. Ingle found me at the lowest point in my doctoral journey and gave me the encouragement to finish despite the obstacles I faced. Without him, none of this would have been possible. To share the title of “Doctor” with him is an honor, and any future work I do will carry a piece of his intellect, his persistence, and his love of uncovering the truth.

I also want to thank Dr. Blake Haselton for his support over the last 20 years. We first crossed paths in the summer of 2000 when I was hired as a teacher in his school district. Dr. Haselton has been a mentor to many and I am happy to be included in that group. Repeatedly, he has proven to be a master strategist and leader. To be able to include him on my dissertation committee gave me incredible motivation.

I also first encountered Dr. Harrie Buecker in my role as a practitioner. She has an unparalleled knowledge of teaching and learning that guided me as a teacher and school leader. When it looked as though my dissertation journey was ending, she gave me the love and support to continue. We all have educational heroes and Dr. Buecker is on my short list. I hope to be half as successful. She is a friend to all...a quality I try to emulate.

A chance encounter afforded me the opportunity to invite Dr. Amy Lingo to my committee. I will forever carry a vivid memory of our conversation concerning

dissertations that ended with, “You’re going to finish.” I am thankful for her encouragement and advice. I have made it a habit to provide the same words to others who are pursuing a doctorate.

Thank you to all of my friends and colleagues whom I called upon for advice as I worked my way from research to proposal to final product. Your suggestions made me stronger, your edits made me sturdier, your reassurance made me believe in my ability.

Finally, I want to thank my family for loving me even when I was not very lovable. The weekends and holidays spent at the kitchen table with headphones on were taxing. Trying to finish a dissertation is a constant weight and, unfortunately, manifested as anger and dread. I am glad I no longer have to answer the question of when I am going to finish “my paper.” Karin, Bailey, Toby, Moise, and Fimi...you are the reason I do what I do. I love you. Thanks for never giving up on me.

ABSTRACT

KENTUCKY'S SUPERINTENDENT INDUCTION PROGRAM: PARTICIPANTS' PERCEPTIONS OF COMPETENCY AND LONGEVITY

Robert L. Smith

April 13, 2019

The position of the school superintendent in the United States, at both the state and local level, has evolved over the past 200 years in response to the needs of the profession, ever-changing communities, and political mandates (Kowalski et al., 2011). The role of superintendent has shifted in focus from teacher-scholar to manager to democratic leader to social scientist and, finally, to communicator (Callahan, 1966; Bjork, Browne-Ferrigno, & Kowalski, 2018). Generalizing the problems facing superintendents can be a challenging proposition. However, no two situations are the same. A number of factors, including school board size, district demographics, financial position, state and local politics, and high-stakes accountability performance can play a role in the challenges facing school superintendents (Byrd, Drews, & Johnson, 2006).

With research indicating that whole-district student achievement is dependent upon superintendent stability (Talbert & Beach, 2013), the need to retain effective superintendents is apparent, especially in historically lower achieving districts. Studies reveal the average tenure of superintendents ranges from less than three years up to more

than six years (Grissom & Anderson, 2012; Natkin et al., 2002). If stability is a desired outcome, how can districts ensure longer tenures for their superintendents? What strategies exist to increase the average number of years for district leadership? Can training play a role in equipping leaders with the necessary tools for battling the known causes of turnover, thereby thwarting the pressures and influences that lead to superintendent transition? Turnover and turnover prevention through advanced levels of training are the foci of this study.

The purpose of my qualitative study was to examine Kentucky's superintendent induction program, designed and implemented by the Kentucky Association of School Administrators (KASA), by analyzing the participants' perceptions of the program in terms of increasing their competency and likelihood of longevity (tenure) in the district leadership role. My study incorporates the use of qualitative methods to describe how superintendents perceive competency and preparedness after one year of exposure to the mandated onboarding induction program. The participants have completed the most recent iteration of the Next Generation Leadership Series—those superintendents who are in Cohort 5 during the 2016-2017 school year.

The findings suggest that participation in a cohort-model induction program enhances competencies and could have a positive influence on longevity. In addition, suggestions for a more effective induction program are included. I recommended further research on the many variables that combine to create an effective, successful superintendent, from personal demographic information to career path options. These recommendations will require researchers to perform longitudinal studies up to 10 years to understand thoroughly the impact of induction, or other trainings, on competency and

longevity. The results of my study add to the research on superintendent retention, induction programs, and mentoring, which emerged as a pivotal theme from both first-time superintendents and veteran superintendents.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The position of the school superintendent in the United States at both state and local levels has evolved over the past 200 years in response to the needs of the profession, ever-changing communities, and political mandates (Kowalski, et al., 2011). As the country developed, so, too, did the public school system and the need for leadership (Callahan, 1966). One of the leadership positions that developed was that of the school superintendent, who appeared as the need for teacher-scholar became apparent. This position became responsible for the development and implementation of curriculum as well as the evaluation of teaching staff (Björk & Kowalski, 2005). The role of superintendent has shifted from teacher-scholar to manager to democratic leader to social scientist and, finally, to communicator (Callahan, 1966; Kowalski, 2005).

Given shifts in responsibility, the evolution of communities and agrarian society giving way to the industrial and technological, and influences from political mandates, the role of superintendent has become increasingly difficult to perform. Generalizing the problems facing superintendents can be a challenging proposition, as no two scenarios are the same. A number of factors including school board size, district demographics, financial position, state and local politics, and high-stakes accountability performance can play a role in the challenges facing school superintendents (Byrd, Drews, & Johnson, 2006).

The aforementioned challenges may have a detrimental effect on the longevity of school superintendents, causing some to wonder if this is just a temporary position (Shand, 2010) only filled until a person can no longer withstand the multitude of negative interactions and influences before handing the baton to a successor. As discussed in Chapter II, the average tenure of school superintendents ranges from 2-7 years. Kentucky is not exempt from this phenomenon, as 83% of all schools districts have experienced a change in superintendent over the last seven years.

Entering the 2017-2018 school year, there were 173 active superintendent positions in Kentucky's 173 public school districts. These 173 superintendents are predominantly white males and possess varying degrees of experience, ranging from 0 to 15 years in their current districts. In total, 38 were in their first year of service. While this initial snapshot may indicate a level of stability with 135 having at least a year of experience, a deeper examination into the tenure data reveals a concerning reality. Beyond the 38 with zero years of experience in their current districts, 63 have one year or less experience, 86 have two years or less experience, 104 have three years or less experience, and 133 have four years or less experience. Additionally concerning is that only eight have 10 years or more experience in their current district. With research indicating whole-district student achievement being influenced by superintendent stability (Talbert & Beach, 2013), the need to retain effective superintendents is apparent, especially in historically lower achieving districts. Furthermore, stability in the position has a positive effect on employee morale, community support, and the efficiency of daily district operations (Waters & Marzano, 2006). The short-term life cycle of a superintendent/district relationship too often ends exactly where it began. A

superintendent is hired, the superintendent leads improvement initiatives, a myriad of factors threatens the superintendent's employment whether external or self-imposed, then the superintendent resigns, retires, or is terminated before the initiatives can embed into the culture of the district (Fullan, 2000).

Despite the multitude of responsibilities, the pressures received from constituents, and the belief that the superintendent lives in the hub of conflict, there are educators who feel a strong pull to the position and have a moderate understanding of the factors that can contribute to longevity (Butera, 2006). Sharp, Malone, and Walter (2002) surveyed 119 superintendents across Indiana, Illinois, and Texas to determine what motivated them to pursue the superintendency. Sharp et al. hypothesized that aspiring superintendents are altruistic in their motivation to pursue the position. The top three responses given were:

1. I thought I could make a difference.
2. The job would allow me to help move the district forward.
3. The job would enable me to provide leadership.

These findings lend evidence to the hypothesis that aspiring superintendents are more concerned with positive student outcomes than personal gain (Sharp et al., 2002).

Given the unselfish attitudes of many new superintendents, coupled with the understanding that the superintendency is the pinnacle of district leadership in P-12 education, the rate of turnover becomes alarming. As outlined in Chapter II, studies reveal the average tenure of superintendents ranges from less than three years up to more than six years (Natkin et al., 2002). If stability is a desired outcome, how can districts ensure longer tenures for their superintendents? What strategies exist to increase the average number of years for district leadership? Can training play a role in equipping

leaders with the necessary tools for battling the known causes of turnover, thereby thwarting the pressures and influences that lead to superintendent transition? Turnover and turnover prevention through advanced levels of training are the foci of this study.

Background of the Study

Due to growing criticism of the nation's public schools, the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE) was created in 1981 to examine the state of schooling in the United States. Out of this commission emerged the publication *A Nation at Risk* (1983), which outlined numerous deficiencies in structures, pedagogy, and achievement results. Recommendations included improvements for educator training programs and, ultimately, accountability for teachers, principals, and superintendents. Though the role once shifted away from teacher-scholar, the integration of the instructional component returned to the responsibilities of a superintendent.

In Kentucky, education reforms continued with the passing of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) of 1990. Intended to ensure the right of every child to an adequate public education, KERA brought about profound changes to school and district accountability measures, and to funding structures and governance for Kentucky school districts as well. The pressure on superintendents to budget adequately became a priority. Since 2008, student funding has not increased proportionally as additional mandates have been placed on school districts (KCEP, 2018).

At the turn of the century, the federal government, under President George W. Bush, implemented the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) which placed additional academic goals on school districts and stressors on school leaders. The legislation expanded the role of the federal government in public education and mandated the

development of standards, assessments, and accountability systems for states. The legislation pressured schools and districts to address achievement gaps and yield adequate yearly progress for student subpopulations, including those identified by race and program enrollment (special education and English as a second language).

NCLB directed public education over the first part of this century until President Barack Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 into law. ESSA, the most recent reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, put a heavier emphasis on the reporting of data in relation to student achievement and graduation but was not nearly as prescriptive as NCLB mandates on the types of interventions used by local school districts. While it was meant to decrease federal influence on local boards of education, ESSA diminished the role of achievement scores in the evaluations of teachers. Administrators, however, remain subject to stringent intervention plans for unchanged low achievement trends.

Effectively performing all of the duties associated with today's superintendency is a difficult proposition (Bjork, Browne-Ferrigno, & Kowalski, 2018). Moreover, the combination of internal and external pressures on the position can make it seem impossible to perform the duties with high levels of effectiveness, especially when considering the financial and academic demands (Talbert & Beach, 2013). With superintendent preparation programs and licensing standards coming under scrutiny since the onset of the position (Kowalski, 2005), more effective training opportunities are needed. The use of mentoring programs, which is a substantial component of Kentucky's induction program for professional growth, has been prevalent in the business sector and in teacher preparation for many years (Alsbury & Hackmann, 2006). However, the

practice of induction programs was not widely used for education administrators until the last 30 years, beginning in the mid-1980s (Daresh, 2004). Very little literature exists on the effectiveness of educational leadership preparation programs, and even less exists on the reflections of superintendents who experienced a formal induction (Orr, 2006a; Orr & Pounder, 2006). Freeley and Seinfeld (2012) found that successful retired superintendents acknowledged the positive impact of mentors in their formative years, but they did not extend their research into formalized induction.

Kentucky was one of the first states to mandate an induction program for school administrators, with legislation from the Kentucky Education Reform Act aimed squarely at superintendent preparation (Fusarelli & Cooper, 2009). At that time, both acting and future superintendents were required to complete a training program that reached into, among other topics, finance, law, personnel management, and site-based decision-making councils. Presently, all new superintendents have a team of mentors, including the school board chair, an experienced, acting superintendent, and an executive coach who also served as a superintendent. Similar to the processes used in the Kentucky Teacher Internship Program (KTIP) and the Kentucky Principal Internship Program (KPIP), this team assists with an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) that culminates in a capstone project at the end of the first year of service.

The provision of induction and mentoring is important in P-12 and higher education, but research also suggests that careful consideration of program design and evaluation is crucial to success (Bell & Treleaven, 2011; Guskey 2002). Wong (2004) noted that, “Induction is a highly organized and comprehensive staff development process, involving many people and components, which typically continues as a

sustained process for two to five years” (p. 107). Is Wong accurate, or is the process that new Kentucky superintendents undergo enough to foster growth in standards and ensure longer tenures? Does this year-long induction process provide enough support to help superintendents meet the demands of the job?

Statement of the Problem

Superintendency tenure is at the heart of this dissertation as I explore the perceptions of first-time superintendents who participated in a superintendent induction program. This tenure is not to be confused with the tenure offered as protection to teachers or other employees who meet certain benchmarks or receive favorable evaluations over a pre-determined period of time. Superintendents who participated in this study are on limited contracts of two to four years. Continuation in the position after the initial contract is at the discretion of elected school board members, with evaluation of defined standards forming the basis of the decision. These standards are addressed in Kentucky’s first-time superintendent induction program (Next Generation Leadership Series) and provide a foundation for the problem. With higher student achievement and district improvement linked to longer superintendent tenure (Waters & Marzano, 2006; Simpson, 2013), the induction program becomes a critical component of training. Is the induction program providing experiences for first-time superintendents that improve competencies and aptitudes that lead to longer tenure?

When viewing tenure and turnover holistically, it is clear that even though superintendent candidates may enter the field honorably and with great intention (Sharp et al., 2002), they may not stay in the position long enough to realize the impact they envisioned. The pressures from state and federal legislation coupled with local board

relationships and the need to support building leaders places superintendents in a precarious position. The tenuous aspect of school and district leadership has been noted for some time. Callahan (1962) documented that one can trace the evolution of our school systems in the twentieth century to “the extreme vulnerability of our schoolmen to public criticism and pressure and that this vulnerability is built into our pattern of local support and control. This has been true in the past and, unless changes are made, will continue to be true in the future” (p. viii). Evidence suggests that in the Commonwealth of Kentucky, over half of the 173 superintendent positions turned over during the period under scrutiny in this study (Caldwell & Strong, 2015).

The pitfalls and pressures associated with, and leading to, superintendent turnover are profound enough without feelings of inadequacy that arise from poorly planned and delivered professional training. In a qualitative study of 30 superintendents, Wills and Peterson (1992) found that 60% were uncertain about their futures and career trajectory. The process by which an educator acquires superintendent licensure in the Commonwealth of Kentucky is the completion of a sequence of courses beyond the principalship, including the creation of a professional portfolio. In addition to certification, all first-year superintendents participate in an onboarding program designed to provide regular job-embedded training in areas of typical concern including finance, personnel, board relations, and visionary leadership. While addressing tenure and turnover, Chapter II will detail the evolution of the onboarding program for new superintendents and the current iteration used by those who assumed the position since the beginning of the 2012 school year.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my qualitative study was to examine Kentucky's superintendent induction program, examining the participants' perceptions of the program in terms of increasing their competency and likelihood of longevity (tenure) in the district leadership role. The informants have completed the most recent iteration of the Next Generation Leadership Series—those superintendents who were in Cohort 5 during the 2016-2017 school year. The program is facilitated by the Kentucky Association of School Administrators and follows a manual designed by acting superintendents. This is not a program review of the onboarding process, but an in-depth analysis of superintendents' reflections and self-perceptions after completion of the experience. There is a story to tell concerning the experiences of a first-year superintendent as it relates to the advanced training they receive throughout the year. This training, combined with knowledge gained in pre-service curriculum, theoretically prepares one for the rigors of the position. Participants were asked to reflect on the training and subsequent experiences from their first year on the job through the present. The findings from my study may have implications for the design of the onboarding program and thereby provide future new superintendents with a skill set that fosters self-confidence in meeting the challenges of the position and influences longer tenures. Some of the research included in Chapter II of this study details the positive impact superintendent tenure can have on student achievement and district success. The Commonwealth of Kentucky has committed to an atmosphere of reform over the last 25 years, and superintendent stability can maximize the effects of this movement.

My study incorporates the use of qualitative methods to describe how superintendents perceive competency and preparedness after one year of exposure to the mandated onboarding induction program. I selected a qualitative approach in order to understand the emotions associated with being a first-time superintendent. In contrast to survey methods, this type of study may generate ideas on how to amend and improve the onboarding program by listening to the voices of the participants themselves.

My study engaged a sample of approximately ten superintendents from Cohort 5, all of whom experienced induction during the 2016 – 2017 school year. These superintendents, with different backgrounds and working in districts of varying size, have the same responsibility of completing the onboarding program. My study used an interpretive theoretical lens to organize and determine meaning in the data (Anfara & Mertz, 2006). Bendassolli (2014) described interpretive frameworks as the means by which “researchers use to make their data intelligible and justify their choices and methodological decisions” (p. 166). This approach satisfies a need for examining and exploring perceptions of competency and longevity through my actions and interactions with new superintendents as opposed to my preconceived assumptions.

My purpose in this qualitative research was to give voice to those who have lived the experience of being a first-time superintendent and to interpret their reflections in a manner that explains their relationship to the induction program. Perceptions of competency in relation to the evaluation standards are included in the findings as well as whether the induction program parlays the acquisition of competencies into an intention to remain in the position for a period of time beyond the average tenure found in other studies. Symon, Cassell, and Johnson (2018) described this interpretivist framework as

an attempt to discern the meaning of the participants' realities. Research in an interpretivist framework seeks "to understand how and when individuals experience alterations or changes in outlooks and worldviews based on the incorporation of information and experiences" (Miner-Romanoff, 2012. p. 1). The relationship between superintendent (the person) and superintendent (the position) is examined through the lens of the new superintendent onboarding program as mandated by Kentucky legislation. Of particular interest is whether the induction activities of the program build competencies that lead to perceptions of satisfaction and effectiveness and, ultimately, longevity in the position. As mentioned previously, my study is not a program review of the induction process but is intended to provide a narrative of superintendent perceptions after completing induction against the demands of the position and the goals of the program. The following research questions guide my study:

1. What are the perceptions of competency among first-time superintendents after completion of the onboarding program?
2. In what ways could the onboarding program better prepare superintendents given the realities of on-the-job professional responsibility and objectives of the programming?
3. What are the perceptions of longevity among first-time superintendents after completion of the onboarding program?

Significance of the Study

My study seeks to use qualitative methods to inform change at the state level through advocacy with legislators and at the local level through improved professional development. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) and Rossman and Rallis (2003) reported that

the purpose of qualitative research is to advance social justice, and this study has the ability to satisfy that claim. The results of my study can advance social justice for all stakeholders connected to Kentucky's public schools by helping design a training program that contributes to more competent leaders and more stability in the position.

My study is significant for four reasons: First, the findings may influence change on KASA's delivery of the Next Generation Leadership Series induction program. Second, graduate-level superintendent preparation programs may benefit from the information. Third, the findings may shape legislation concerning school reform to meet the needs of future superintendents, potentially affecting student achievement. Fourth and finally, prospective superintendents and new superintendents may use the information to better equip themselves for the challenges facing the position, and extend their tenures in the role.

The new superintendent induction program is currently structured as a series of 6 two-day trainings over the course of the school year, mostly conducted at the KASA offices in Frankfort. An online platform serves as a place to hold conversations with other cohort members and to collect evidence of progress. One of the criticisms of the program is the amount of time spent out of the district. My study may shed light on that criticism and provide suggestions for the delivery of content for future cohorts. In addition, findings from this study could illuminate the need for more or less concentration on specific content. There is currently a heavy emphasis on finance and law due to statute, for instance, but minimal support on legislative influence.

The working relationship between higher education and P-12 could be improved through the findings of this study. Superintendent licensure programs at the graduate

level are typically a short sequence of coursework along with a capstone project such as a portfolio or culminating action research project. While there is an experiential component to the programs, it is mostly devoid of mentoring relationships or substantial time spent with those acting as superintendents. My personal experience included being matched with an assistant superintendent, but never with an actual superintendent. If licensure programs were aware of the reflections of superintendents who completed the induction program, they may better tailor their programs to meet their articulated needs.

Legislation at the state level, specifically in the area of licensure and school district accountability, may be altered to better meet the needs of acting superintendents. Superintendent longevity in a district can have a dramatic positive effect on student achievement. Getting the most competent educators into the position and keeping them in the position is a priority (Kamrath & Brunner, 2014). Kentucky's general assembly has the ability to pass legislation that provides for fair and unbiased evaluation of superintendents that parallels both the pre-service learning experiences and induction programs of those who hold the position.

Educators considering a career path to the superintendency may use the findings of this study to better prepare themselves for the position. Those in teaching or school administrative positions can begin the process of learning the less experiential facets of the job prior to enrolling in graduate school or licensure programs. They may also begin participating in activities such as board meetings that do not conflict with their daily duties, analyzing these opportunities for components of the superintendent position. Granted, maximum exposure to the position is somewhat dependent on the willingness of

the district to provide access, but my study will clearly outline those components that need the most attention.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used in the context of this study:

Competency

Superintendents are evaluated on a set of standards outlined in the Next Generation Leadership Series. Competency is the level of attainment on each of the standards as determined by local boards of education. The four levels of competency are *Exemplary*: exceeds the standard, *Accomplished*: meets the standard, *Developing*: makes growth toward meeting the standard, and *Growth Required*: area(s) required addressed in the Professional Growth Plan.

County district

These school districts are coterminous with county lines and comprise multiple communities. There are 120 county districts in Kentucky. The largest enrollment for a county district is approximately 100,000 students (Jefferson County Public Schools).

Education Professional Standards Board (EPSB)

This organization serves as the agency for certification programs in the state. Their mission is to promote high levels of student achievement by establishing and enforcing rigorous professional standards for preparation, certification, and responsible and ethical behavior of all professional educators in Kentucky (EPSB, 2017). Prior to the induction program, superintendents attain licensure by this organization, thereby qualifying them actively to pursue jobs in the state.

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

ESSA, signed by President Obama in 2015, was the most recent reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (EASA). While standardized testing remained a component of the law, more authority returned to the states as opposed to federal oversight. Provisions for equity and equality remained in the law, reinforcing mandates set forth by NCLB.

Individualized Learning Plan (ILP)

First-time superintendents participating in the induction program, along with a board member, a mentor superintendent, and an executive coach, develop a learning plan. This plan, and the induction program, culminate with an end-of-year presentation on progress made toward the competencies outlined in the evaluation standards.

Independent district

These school districts are typically smaller than county districts and defined by a municipality. They may be referred to as “city schools” depending on part of the state. There are 53 independent districts in Kentucky, with Silver Grove being the smallest K-12, serving just under 200 students and Bowling Green being the largest K-12, with over 1100 students. Four of the 53 are K-8 districts, including Anchorage, East Bernstadt, Southgate, and West Point.

Induction

First-time superintendents participate in a year-long program designed to acclimate them to the position. Participants spend approximately twelve days outside of their districts in professional development focused on meeting the demands of the position through intentional activities linked to developing competencies in the evaluation standards. These standards are discussed at length in Chapter II.

Kentucky Association of School Administrators (KASA)

KASA is the acronym for the Kentucky Association of School Administrators, which is the professional organization of numerous school-level and district-level administrators. With over 3000 members, this is the premier administrative organization in the state. The induction program, developed by KASA's leadership for first-time superintendents, provides a backdrop against which participants reflect on their competencies.

Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA)

In the late 1980's, 66 Kentucky school districts filed a lawsuit claiming the need for equalizing resources among districts. The Kentucky Supreme Court ruled the entire educational system unconstitutional because it failed to provide equitable and adequate experiences for students as required by the state Constitution. KERA was signed into law in 1990 as the legislative response to the Supreme Court ruling that the state's schools were inefficient and inequitable. The result was viewed as one of the most comprehensive reform proposals ever enacted, leading to a complete overhaul of authority, funding, and the school accountability model.

Kentucky Principal Internship Program (KPIP)

All applicants for principal certification are required to complete a one-year internship program upon employment as a school administrator. The emphasis of the program is on promoting the growth of the new principal as the school's instructional leader through structured mentoring experiences, performance observations with feedback, access to current research and information relevant to the role of the principal,

and provision of opportunities for networking with both experienced and beginning principals.

Longevity

This is a lesser used term but is interchangeable with *tenure*, also defined in this section.

Next Generation Leadership Series

Unveiled prior to the 2012 – 2013 school year, this program defined the standards to evaluate Kentucky superintendents. It is an extensive onboarding process that provides deeper knowledge levels, broadened skill sets, practical application, and dispositions for leadership based on seven effectiveness standards for superintendents (KASA, 2017).

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)

NCLB is a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act from 1965 and was signed into law in 2002 by President George W. Bush. States were required to test students in reading and math in grades 3 through 8 and once in high school, with the goal that all students should meet or exceed state standards in reading and math (proficiency) by 2014. The primary emphasis of NCLB was to close student achievement gaps by providing all children with equal opportunities to obtain high-quality learning and school experiences.

Onboarding

This term is interchangeable with *induction*, also defined in this section.

Support Education Excellence in Kentucky (SEEK)

SEEK is a funding formula for school districts that combines local and state revenue. The formula accounts for special needs students and, when applicable, transportation costs.

Tenure

Tenure is the length of service of a superintendent in a specific school district. In Kentucky, superintendents are not guaranteed a position in a district after successful completion of a pre-determined number of contracted years like other certified employees. Local boards of education determine and offer superintendent contracts, which typically span four years. In some situations, contracts are for one, two, or three years. For example, a superintendent who completes two four-year contracts, and then retires, had an eight-year tenure.

Turnover

Turnover is the term describing the transition from one superintendent to another in the same district. This period of transition is often associated with failed initiatives and low staff morale (Yates & Jong, 2018).

Dissertation Overview

Chapter I of my study includes an introduction to the concept of superintendent induction and how this process is meant to build efficacy in those who inherit the position, a statement of the problem, statement of purpose, limitations and delimitations, and significance of the study. Action research provides a framework for the entire study, using an interpretivist construct to examine the reflections of first-time superintendents after completion of the induction program. Presentation of the research questions and a dissertation overview are also included.

Chapter II presents a thorough review of the literature using the framework introduced in Chapter I. I provide an introduction into the superintendency: a history of the position and why educators seek the position, the expectations associated with the job, factors affecting tenure, and possible reasons for turnover. Study findings pertaining to tenure and turnover among public school superintendents are included as well. Inadequate training programs provide the justification for a critical view of statistics regarding superintendents in Kentucky. Finally, I discussed the history of the superintendent onboarding program along with the latest iteration of the KASA training manual.

Chapter III explores the qualitative methodology used to answer the research questions. A discussion presents the formation of the data collection instruments, my role as the researcher, and the backgrounds of the participants. My study incorporates the use of qualitative methods to tell the story of how first-time superintendents perceive their competency and aptitude as well as longevity in the position after participating in a superintendent induction program.

Chapter IV presents the findings of the in-depth interviews with first-time superintendents, superintendent mentors, and the Executive Director of the Center for Education Leadership as well as the analysis of superintendent training documents. Multiple themes emerged from the data, including the motivation behind educators pursuing the position, the challenges faced by superintendents, and suggestions for better preparing superintendents given the multitude of internal and external influences.

Chapter V offers a discussion of the findings, answering the research questions grounded in the context of the first-time superintendent onboarding program

implemented by KASA and focused on competency and longevity. Specifically, do first-time superintendents have positive perceptions of competency and do they view themselves as having lengthy tenures based on the training they received during their first year of service?

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to share the results of other research literature associated with the superintendency of U.S. public school districts, identifying and discussing the extant research and gaps that still exist. The literature review situates my study within the research literature on the superintendency, justifying the relevance and need for my study.

From the onset of the public school administrative structure, the superintendent position has been under great scrutiny, often resulting in short tenures and high rates of turnover (Yates & Jong, 2018). I theorize that inadequate support and preparation is perceived by superintendent informants as contributing to superintendent turnover and that articulated support programs are perceived as beneficial in terms of extending the tenure of superintendents. The following research questions guide my study:

1. What are the perceptions of competency among first-time superintendents after completion of the onboarding program?
2. In what ways could the onboarding program better prepare superintendents given the realities of on-the-job professional responsibility and objectives of the programming?
3. What are the perceptions of longevity among first-time superintendents after completion of the onboarding program?

The first section of Chapter II provided a brief history of the superintendency and an investigation of the issues facing the position since the late 1800s, with a more comprehensive look at the contemporary superintendent of the last 40 years. Of particular interest are the myriad of responsibilities and challenges facing superintendents and how these responsibilities and challenges may lead to attrition.

In the second section of Chapter II, I reviewed research documenting the statistics of superintendent turnover and the factors identified in the research literature as associated with involuntary superintendent turnover. I examine the personal characteristics of superintendents, such as age, race, and gender as well as district characteristics including location, size, and board relations.

In the third section of Chapter II, I provided a review of the training measures used in an attempt to mitigate superintendent turnover. Studies on pre-service programs provided by universities are included in this review, as are studies investigating induction and mentoring programs across the country. Kentucky is not unique in terms of superintendent tenure or in trying to develop the most effective school district leaders. Any analysis of the relationship between induction programs and competencies or length of tenure were of particular interest.

In the final section, I delved into the research concerning professional development and mentoring. My purpose in this section is to frame the case that research on perceptions of competency and longevity are necessary if the state is intentional about superintendent preparation, induction, and sustained academic achievement through stability in the position. There is a clear gap in the research concerning these components.

School Superintendents – A Brief History

The earliest record of an appointed state superintendent was 1812 in New York. Soon thereafter, other states in the Northeast followed, appointing state superintendents of schools (Callahan, 1996). The person occupying this position performed three basic duties: create a school district template, keep the education system financially solvent, and work with the state legislature for the benefit of the school districts. Not long after, individual school districts also began including the position of superintendent. Most historical accounts give credit to Buffalo, New York and Louisville, Kentucky as the first districts to appoint local superintendents (Greider et al., 1969). With these newly appointed positions also came the pressures to satisfy the needs of multiple constituents. As a result, turnover became common.

In an article published by the Trustees of Boston University in 1914, district leaders across the country answered a series of questions concerning their many responsibilities and the relationships with those whom they serve. The trustees outlined a number of conflicting reasons for removal of superintendents from office, lamenting the inconsistent nature of the post. They wrote, “Superintendence is as vital as any feature of the public school system, but its efficiency is sadly discounted because of the insecurity of position” (p. 696).

Early in the 20th century, superintendents were trained as “teacher-scholars” (Cuban, 1974). However, the industrial age and events, such as World War I and mass immigration, demanded a new focus from school leaders, shifting them from scholars to managers. What once was a position that dealt with the nuances of acquiring knowledge was becoming a position of efficiency and fiscal management. Superintendents were

underprepared for this shift, resulting in concerns with longevity in the superintendent position—concerns still relevant today. John H. Francis (Trustees, 1914), a superintendent from Los Angeles, openly questioned the fortitude of sitting district leaders in the face of external pressures. Revealing his belief that public education was headed toward an ominous ending, Francis was quoted as saying, “There are too many un-educational forces arrayed against it” and that education “must wrench her interests free from these extraneous and un-educational forces and must stand on her own merits” (p. 698). Francis’s perception of these external influences was that they caused committed educators to leave the position or to lose interest in the work and become ineffective.

B. M. Watson (Trustees, 1914), a superintendent from Spokane, Washington provided a similar account in the same article and was no less pessimistic about the future of the position. He aimed his ire at bureaucracy, concerned with the power of lawmakers and their continuous reach into the world of public education. He perceived a constant cycle of influence that negatively affected his position and was hard to contain. He commented, “This will be true as long as there is such a mixture of legislative and administrative functions as obtains under our present theories of representative government” (p.700). He continued with his commentary on influence and proposed oversight of the position by a non-political entity. He stated that a superintendent under different authority could “go ahead and do his work without the necessity of constantly taking the temperature of public sentiment and without being hampered by these petty, personal and sometimes spiteful interests” (p. 700).

Time has done little to help ease the struggles of the public school superintendent, as mid-century leaders faced the same irrefutable influences that accompany the position. In the *Peabody Journal of Education*, T. O. Hall (1941), acting superintendent of Greenville, Kentucky, discussed the variety of dilemmas faced while on the job. He posited, “The superintendent of schools is often faced with the necessity of making decisions which may be reprehensible in some respects, but which, nevertheless, must be made” (p.241). Continuing on the theme of political influence, Hall also took aim at local boards of education, stating that superintendents would never be free from dilemmas “so long as members of boards of education seek selfish personal aggrandizement through their positions” (p. 241).

The politician that Hall described in the 1940s gave way to the superintendent as social scientist in the middle of the century, with the school district leader impacted by the Red Scare, the space race, and the fight for civil rights. Prior to this era, the daily activities of district superintendent focused inward, with concerns centered on operations. The social context of the day dictated a more global or external view of the school district, thereby transforming the position (Kowalski, 2006).

The last quarter of the 20th century up until the present is the period that Kowalski (2005) calls the communication period for superintendents. This period coincides with the era of educational reform characterized by standards, assessment, and greater accountability. Greater diversity, lack of adequate funding, and the advent of high-stakes accountability made it more difficult for school leaders to meet the needs of all students (Bjork & Kowalski, 2005).

Over time, formal training for superintendents became a necessity. However, at the beginning of the 21st century, not all of the 50 states required a specific preparation program for superintendent licensure. Among the states that did require specific training, about a third of all states allowed alternative means to gain certification (Feistritzer, 2003). Given this reality, there was a strong relationship with the declining tenure of school superintendents in the face of the evolving complexities of the position. The pressures and scrutiny placed on the superintendent are still leading to turnover and a diminished pool of superintendent applicants from which a district can select a leader (Orr, 2007). I discussed these pressures later in this chapter.

The Contemporary Superintendent

Though Kowalski (2005) reframed the contemporary superintendent to be primarily a communicator, the roles played are all encompassing, with responsibilities running the gamut of Callahan's (1966) labels of teacher-scholar, manager, politician, and social scientist in addition to communicator. Bjork, Browne-Ferrigno, and Kowalski (2014) commented, "The notion that superintendents' work may be characterized as consisting of five major roles is grounded in historical and empirical evidence" (p. 2) and that separating the roles is futile due to the overlap of responsibility. In fact, a superintendent may play multiple roles in a single interaction. Moreover, there are obvious connections with these labels and the performance standards used by Kentucky boards of education when evaluating superintendents. Those performance standards include strategic, instructional, cultural, human resource, managerial, collaborative, and influential (political) leadership. In this section, I explore each of those job responsibility labels in relation to the contemporary superintendent as well as the expectations of

Kentucky's performance standards. After exploring the roles of the superintendent, I outline the challenges and demands associated with the position.

Superintendent as teacher-scholar

School district leaders of the late 19th century were practicing academics, and while there is little reason to believe superintendents will return fully to that mindset, there has been a shift to becoming much more in tune with what happens in classrooms. In a traditional sense, the role of instructional leader takes place at the school level. However, superintendents who took active roles in the district instructional programming were more successful than their peers (Bjork & Kowalski, 2005). With the passing of ESSA in 2015, superintendents are responsible for the data associated with student achievement from primary grades through graduation, continuing the responsibility associated with NCLB at the turn of the 21st century and necessitating the need for superintendents to be instructional leaders. Data must be the driving force of improvement, with applicability to comparisons at the national and global levels (Hoyle et al., 2005). At the local level, the instructional influence by superintendents on the actions of principals and teachers has a direct impact on student learning, as well as the school-based decision making in relation to teacher recruitment and retention, finances, and progress toward academic goals (Hoyle et al., 2005). In sum, superintendents are often the sole party responsible for achievement in the district (Bjork, Kowalski, & Browne-Ferrigno, 2014).

Standard 2 defines instructional leadership for Kentucky's superintendents. In order to satisfy this standard, superintendents must be overt in their words and actions in relation to teaching and learning. Schools under their watch must educate all types of

learners according to specific goals and with appropriate measures to monitor progress toward those goals. If that were not enough, superintendents must ensure progress on 21st learning skills like collaboration, innovation, and the use of technology.

Superintendent as manager

As agrarian society gave way to the industrial era, the superintendent evolved from strictly teacher-scholar to a combination of academic and manager (Cuban, 1998) where the oversight of financial resources and business acumen became imperative (Bjork & Kowalski, 2005). Though the position has continued to evolve to the present day, the superintendent as manager has remained a steady role. Among the many responsibilities undertaken by the superintendent are recruitment of new employees, performance evaluation, supervision of school administrators, transportation, and balancing the budget. Kowalski (2006) posited that superintendent effectiveness is based primarily on his or her ability to manage the organization and that other responsibilities are secondary.

Effective managerial leadership, which is Standard 5 in Kentucky, oversees the processes by which the district operates, from staffing and technology to transportation and facilities. Efficient processes maximize resources, communicate clear expectations, and build consensus within the school community. Regular assessment of process is the norm for efficiently running districts. In smaller districts, the superintendent can be more hands-on with management. Conversely, larger districts depend on a surplus of employees for efficient operations. However, the superintendent is still responsible for the managerial leadership of overseeing the systems.

Bolman and Deal (2013) define human resources as “the interplay between organizations and people” (p. 120). Furthermore, human resources oversight, which is Standard 4 in Kentucky, is a key piece of managerial leadership and demands the school district be one large professional learning community where people – their talents, skills, and cognition – are the greatest commodity. The charge of all superintendents is to find the absolute best employees, provide them with adequate training, and place them in positions where individual talents can mature. This can be an incredibly difficult proposition for a new superintendent who is learning the job and likely missed the most recent hiring cycle that occurs in the spring months preceding the start of the school year.

To meet the expectations of this standard, a new superintendent may focus his attention on establishing a positive work environment for all employees, with a premium placed on professional growth. The evaluation of employees also falls within this standard, meaning an opportunity exists to further the vision and mission of the district through the insistence of high expectations. The goal is to coach employees to higher levels of performance, or in some cases, evaluate them out of the district. Above all else, work in this standard aims at supporting the academic program and student achievement.

One of the most difficult lessons of a new superintendent is budget development. Not only does one learn the legalities of school finance in the first year of service, there is also the simultaneous need to align budget items with the emerging vision of the school district. Many times, this also includes the need to secure resources from outside agencies, thereby blending multiple superintendent performance standards.

Superintendent as politician

The most important relationship for a superintendent is that held with his school board, with 83% of superintendents identifying their relationship with a board as a greatest challenge (Bjork, Kowalski, & Browne-Ferrigno, 2014). Since the turn to the 21st century, the political aspects of the superintendency have grown in scope due to disparity in income in many urban areas filled with minorities, the rise of immigrants, and the growing number of students identified as having disabilities. These factors, coupled with state and federal mandates and internal pressures from unions and site-based decision-making councils, have intensified the job responsibilities (Kowalski, et al., 2011)

Successful school districts help build strong partnerships with their communities, better known as collaborative leadership, or Standard 6 in Kentucky. Superintendents, in concert with parents, community leaders, and businesses, invest in the school district for the betterment of the city or county where the district resides. On behalf of the school board, the superintendent forms partnerships to assist in advancing the district vision and mission. This may mean collaboration with a local college or university or the local education cooperative. A heavy emphasis on career readiness in this century has precipitated the need for districts to collaborate with business and industry as well, the primary goal being individualized opportunities for all students irrespective of career choice.

Learning the nuances of the superintendent position and creating a culture within the district leaves little time for immersion into the political world of public education. However, a politically influential superintendent (Standard 7) must understand the laws and district policies that govern day-to-day operations and apply those laws and policies

in a fair and equitable manner. Collaboration with the board of education and district attorney ensures the protection of staff and students. On the state or national level, influential leadership entails involvement in the development of legislation or even opposition to proposed legislation. To satisfy this component, school boards recommend that new superintendents actively participate in professional organizations and local education cooperatives.

Superintendent as social scientist

Prior to the civil rights movement, the superintendent as a social scientist came into vogue in response to the economic disparity of the nation's schools. Large portions of the population received an inferior education due to the segregationist attitudes of the day, often ignoring the findings from social research. Superintendents inherited the role of advocate in an effort to mitigate inequities (Bjork, Browne-Ferrigno, & Kowalski, 2014). Fast-forwarding 60 years to today, Bjork, Kowalski, and Browne-Ferrigno (2014) found that superintendents are once again leaning on the social sciences in an attempt to understand the social injustices that plague school districts. Superintendents are “expected to be aware of contextual issues such as changing demographics, poverty, racism, drugs and violence, and ensure that schools are simultaneously socially just, democratic and productive” (pp. 12-13).

Strategic leadership (Standard 1), perhaps the broadest of the standards and leaning heavily on the social sciences, aims at satisfying the vision and mission – development, articulation, communication, and implementation – of the school district. Proving competency in this standard begins with an effective working relationship with the local board of education. These five elected community members are responsible for

governing the school district. It is imperative that a new superintendent establish open lines of communication with this team as they work together to construct a shared vision for students and the district as a whole.

On a much larger scale, the superintendent must provide opportunities for all other stakeholders – students, parents, staff, and community – to have a voice in the direction of the district through intentional measures, which promote honest feedback. These stakeholders create the improvement plans of a district. Of course, these plans also call on the expertise of financial directors, school administrators, and the state department of education with the definitive goal of preparing students for life. Any form of social injustice must be dealt with swiftly, and thoroughly, through policy and practice.

Superintendent as communicator

As mentioned earlier, Kowalski (2005) added on to Callahan's work by dubbing the contemporary superintendent as a communicator. In fact, Kowalski (2005) contended, "effective communication behavior used by superintendents has influenced both school culture and productivity" (p. 101). Bjork, Kowalski, and Browne-Ferrigno (2014), substantiated this point by suggesting, "Superintendents' communicator role is shaped by two conditions—the need to restructure school cultures and the need to access and use information in a timely manner to identify and solve problems of practice" (p. 13).

Culture is comprised of the norms, values, and traditions of a group of people or an organization. School districts carry traditions inherited by a new superintendent. Sometimes these traditions are positives and perpetuated through assimilation of new members of the district. However, traditions can also be barriers to a district, and it is

beholden upon the superintendent to provide an avenue of change. In either situation, those stakeholders associated with the district must be engaged in efforts to improve. Producing this shared vision is a tenet of cultural leadership, or Kentucky's Standard 3.

First, the superintendent must create opportunities for diverse views and mindsets to come together for the benefit of student learning. Communicating high expectations and ideals will provide the framework by which the culture of the district takes form. Trust and safety are paramount to form or sustain an identity. The charge of unifying an array of people and outlooks around traditions that support the goals and mission of the school district falls directly on the superintendent. The successes of the organization should be celebrated regularly, diversity noted as often as possible. The current technological age demands that superintendents enhance the culture and information loops of an organization through effective technologies such as social media (Kowalski & Keedy, 2005).

Challenges

In relation to demands in the present era of standard, assessment, and accountability reform, my study focuses primarily on the last 40 years of public education as it pertains to superintendent tenure and turnover. As a beginning point in this period, the following study highlights the pressures associated with the position and an example of why this is a contentious position due to a combination of internal and external factors. A superintendent must be capable of navigating the waters of internal and external pressures while simultaneously creating a collaborative environment where stakeholders have a voice in the organization.

In a quantitative study of 215 school districts with populations over 15,000 students, Talmage and Ornstein (1976) focused on superintendents' attitudes toward community advisement (voice and input) versus community control (decision-making power) in designing school policy relative to four distinct pieces of school management: curriculum, student affairs, school finances, and personnel. As assumed by the researchers, public school superintendents were generally much more amicable to advisement than control. Talmage and Ornstein found a significant difference between advisement and control ($p < .001$) on each of the four distinct areas of management. Given the findings and further analysis, Talmage and Ornstein concluded, “The superintendent, as he functions within a given social system, is relating and reacting to a host of local issues and interrelated variables that override any effects of size, location, and composition of student body” (p. 212).

In the era of reform, the role of the superintendent became increasingly complex given the socio-political context of the nation and the onslaught of high-stakes accountability (Talbert & Beach, 2013). Talbert and Beach (2013) commented, “Demands of both fiscal and academic accountability have made the job seem impossible at times” (p. 33). More than ever before, and continuing to the present, superintendents have been expected to perform consistently well in all facets of management, personnel, and instruction. Wolf (1988) described the role as “chief executive officer of the school board” and with the expectation “to remain the efficient manager, relate effectively to the board, secure adequate funding, maintain district facilities, relate well to the community, secure and develop highly effective educators, and improve educational opportunities for all students” (pp. 9-10).

The superintendent, given the variety of expectations, serves a number of masters. Bolman and Deal (2013) consider this an assumption of the political frame, where various groups within the coalition are vying for power or resources. As an employee of the board of education, the superintendent must promote effective lines of communication among those with whom he works closely in order to foster improvement. At the same time, the superintendent may feel an obligation to protect his administrators and teachers from external influences that could harm the instructional program while those same administrators and teachers may “negotiate external policies with their own internal goals and strategies” (Rutledge, Harris, & Ingle, 2010). Finally, superintendents are mandated to enact legislation or programming from the state and national levels. School district and superintendent survival is dependent on the ability of the superintendent to manage the inter-connected relationships of stakeholders and meeting the “ceremonial demands of a highly institutionalized environment” (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, p. 353).

In the remainder of this section, I examine the demands of the position at both the micro and macro levels, beginning with why superintendents pursue the position, the qualifications that make them viable candidates, and how the traits that make them strong candidates are often at a disconnect with job responsibilities. Beach and Reinhartz (1990) called this conflict a “mismatch between what they are required to do versus what they feel they should be doing” (p. 55). This mismatch was evident in the findings by Wolf (1988) who asked superintendents in the state of Washington to rank order 30 activities in terms of importance. Wolf then compared the superintendents’ ranking to those of a panel of education experts (former superintendents and university professors).

Wolf found that while there was mutual agreement on most activities, acting superintendents were much more likely to focus on the immediate such as leaking roofs or transportation routes rather than the long-term goals of improving instructional practice or achievement indicators. This dichotomy of concrete versus abstract appears again later in this study when discussing reasons for superintendent turnover, with a link to the failure on behalf of superintendents to build consensus and engage in long-term processes to ensure growth.

Given the multitude of responsibilities associated with the position, finding candidates is often a difficult proposition. Sharp et al., (2002) surveyed 119 superintendents across Indiana, Illinois, and Texas to determine what motivated them to pursue the position. Using a Likert Scale of 1-5, participants evaluated 13 possible reasons for their motivation to become a superintendent. The top three responses given were:

1. I thought I could make a difference.
2. The job would allow me to help move the district forward.
3. The job would enable me to provide leadership.

These findings suggest that aspiring superintendents are altruistic in their motivation to pursue the position. As a whole, they are more concerned with positive student outcomes than personal gain, but wanting the job is not enough. Along with motivation, candidates must possess desirable traits or dispositions.

Johnson (1981) provided guidelines for aspiring superintendents based on her work as a senior consultant to the National School Boards Association. After having led over 80 superintendent searches, she outlined a list of traits and behavioral characteristics

as the most desirable from a school board perspective. This section examines those qualities as they relate to the superintendent position. Interestingly, the majority of the qualities correlate to people and relationships as opposed to the business of school. This is also important later in this chapter when discussing the reasons for superintendent turnover.

First, Johnson (1981) found that a superintendent must be credible. Credibility manifests in a variety of ways and arrives in an array of situations. Simply knowing the demographic makeup of the community and board members makes the superintendent credible. It would be impossible to make good decisions or speak in an acceptable manner without knowing the constituents. Every community has unique characteristics that must be considered in daily decision making so as to keep morale and support at a high and the number of enemies to a minimum. Sometimes this means bridging the gap between yesterday and the future. Bolman and Deal (2013) described this scenario as old-timers representing tradition, stability, and wisdom, while the newcomers represent energy and reform. Both are integral to organizational culture and practice.

Because the superintendent position is one of influence, accepting truths and owning deficiencies is required. The credible superintendent accepts full responsibility for everything that happens in the district, including unforeseen consequences of governmental mandates and decisions (Langlois & Lapointe, 2010). Green (2015) found that effective schools are possible when school district leadership and community leaders come together in a coordinated effort.

The effective superintendent must also be a capable communicator with the board of education. In the Commonwealth of Kentucky (the context of my study), the school

board is comprised of five elected members of the community or county and is to represent constituents through voice and decision-making. The superintendent has to ensure adequate structures of communication, clear messages of communication, and evaluation processes to ensure remedy if the systems break down. Kowalski (2006) found “the specific activity of establishing mutual understanding and working relationship with the school board was the most critical activity of the role” (p. 13). Given this reality, Harvey (2003) found that more than two-thirds of superintendents reported that their boards acted outside of their official capacity.

In addition, a sought-after superintendent candidate is expected to be capable in curriculum. After all, the business of school is still teaching and learning despite a shift in the responsibilities of the position. Superintendents must be capable with instructional methodology as well as having the ability to interpret assessment data in relation to local and national comparison points (Hoyle et al., 2005). This trait is more noticeable in small school districts where the superintendent may not have a comprehensive administrative team and therefore must focus on the immediate needs of the district as opposed to the long-term impact of instructional practice. Superintendents of large districts more than likely have an instructional team operating out of a central office and are therefore less likely to be engaged in the instructional practice of the school buildings. The pitfall for superintendents in these districts is to remain involved despite having a team in place.

Finally, there is perhaps no factor more taxing than the emphasis on student achievement; especially in relation to underprivileged students and those with disabilities. Throughout the past 40 years, public schools in the United States have been operating under the umbrella of high-stakes accountability and reform. With federal funding

topping out in billions of dollars, the emphasis on school performance has been profound. The pressure to perform has fallen squarely on teachers, principals, and superintendents to improve student achievement.

Regardless of origin or intensity, the number of pressures or influences on school superintendents continues to mount. Reform has done little to alleviate the scrutiny placed on school district leaders. Superintendents must perform a balancing act, with supporting teachers and students on one side and meeting the needs of the board and community on the other. All of this takes place in the arena of pressure and influence. As Meyer and Rowan (1977) concluded, the expectations of the community are often not in line with the practices of an efficient and effective school district. Because the school district ceremonially adopts these “myths” as truths, the district is undercut and performance is hindered. The past 40 years have only perpetuated the pressure on leadership, contributing to high percentages of turnover as revealed by the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) given by the National Center for Education Statistics. In the next section, I examine the attrition rate of superintendents in the United States.

Attrition

In 1981, the National Commission on Excellence in Education investigated the quality of education in the United States’ public schools in response to economic and technological threats of developed countries around the globe. The prevailing thought of the day was that if the United States was to maintain dominance in the global market, then there was no better place to produce thinkers than P-12 education. After considerable investigation, the Commission released *A Nation at Risk* in 1983. This report forever changed school, sowing the seeds for sweeping reforms in almost all facets

of the organization, most notably the institution of standards, assessments, and high-stakes accountability, which reached its apex with the enactment of NCLB under the George W. Bush administration. Teachers, and, by proxy, principals, are now held accountable for the results emanating from curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

In response to the report, the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy developed a task force to bolster the teaching profession and to meet the outlined demands. While this task force worked to improve teaching and learning at the building level, school district leaders were not offered the same level of training. The result of inadequate training is turnover, both at the teacher level and for administrators. Whether *A Nation at Risk* is responsible for turnover in the era of reform is debatable, but the inability of school districts to maintain superintendents is not debatable. Superintendents are continually at risk and a possible factor is lack of preparation. Now 40 years after the beginning of reform, the average superintendent length of service of 6 years has declined when compared to 9 years average tenure pre-1977.

Superintendents are not remaining in the position for great lengths of time. It is easily understood why Callahan (1962) expressed concern over the vulnerability of school district leaders to public criticism and how this vulnerability would continue as long as control rested with external entities. More than a half century later, Callahan was prophetic in his prediction, as tenure and turnover rates have not improved, but have actually declined. The impact can be profound. Superintendent turnover creates discord in all facets of a district, affecting administrators, teaching staff, and the community, all of which can lead to hindering student achievement (Grissom & Mitani, 2016).

The research literature suggests that the U. S. educational system tends to inadequately address the problem of superintendent turnover. Three studies, approximately twenty years apart, all found similar findings. Cuban (1974), clearly concerned about the state of the position, wrote, “The fit between the times, the local political context, and the dominant conception of leadership may well determine whether a schoolman can last out his contract” (p. 282). Not much had changed by the early 1990’s concerning superintendent turnover despite the era of reform being in full swing. Anderson (1989) looked at school districts of all sizes and found that the national rate of turnover was 13.5%. That rate was higher among smaller school districts. The effects of *A Nation at Risk* were already a decade old, and while teacher and principal preparedness and retention were at the forefront, such was not the case for school district leaders. Hall and Difford (1992) studied this same issue twenty years after Cuban. Among the findings: 102 of 186 superintendent positions in Georgia had turned over in the three years preceding their study. They also found 35 of the 85 New Mexico superintendencies were vacant in 1991. Hall and Difford wrote:

School districts are under intense pressure from state and federal governments, school boards, unions, courts, tight budgets, diverse parent interests and the increasingly complex needs of children. The superintendent is in the middle of this array of cross-fires. Turnover in the superintendency is one of the consequences. (p. 4)

The rural Midwest experienced much of the same in the 1990s. In two separate studies of rural superintendents in Illinois, Eaton (1994) found that 30% of the positions

involuntarily turned over in a single year, and Sharp (1995) found that 70% turned over within five years. Throughout the 1990s and into the era of No Child Left Behind beginning in 2002, the outcomes associated with superintendent turnover did not improve. Grissom and Andersen (2012) reported that among 215 superintendents hired prior to the 2006-07 school year, 45% exited the position within three years of assuming office.

Research reveals a broad range of tenure years in the superintendency position. Cuban (1974) reported, “In 1953, for the 25 largest school systems, the average incumbent superintendent served six and a half years; a decade later current tenure slipped to five and a half years; and in 1973 it was just over four years” (p. 279). Yielding more promising results than Cuban, Campbell, Cunningham, Nystrand, and Usdan (1990) found an average tenure of seven years for 1,528 superintendents in a large-scale analysis of tenure over a 32-year period in Wisconsin. In yet another study of large urban districts, Yee and Cuban (1996) focused on the 25 largest districts in the country, calculating tenure during each decade of the twentieth century. They found an average of 5.76 years in 1990, which more than doubles the tenure found in the CGSS study just three years later. However, they indicated a profound decrease from tenure in the mid-century, validating Cuban’s earlier work. In the aforementioned 1999 study conducted by the Council of Great City Schools, 57 large urban districts were surveyed on superintendent longevity with 48 responding. The mean tenure of those districts was just 2.33 years.

In the 21st century, results still have not changed very much. On behalf of the American Association of School Administrators, Glass, Bjork, and Brunner (2000)

conducted a survey of over 2200 superintendents across the country and found the average tenure to be between five and six years. Not long after, in a quantitative study of 292 North Carolina superintendents, Natkin et al., (2002) found that irrespective of district location or size, the average tenure was six to seven years, a decrease of about one year since the mid-1970s.

Despite a range of average tenures for superintendents, researchers do agree on one component: urban superintendents have shorter tenures than those in suburban and rural districts (Byrd, Drews, & Johnson, 2006). According to a 2014 survey from the Council of the Great City Schools, the average tenure for superintendents was three years in urban school districts as compared to six years in suburban areas (Mincburg, 2017). In addition, districts with lower test scores experienced higher turnover along with those districts, which offered lower salary packages. Surprisingly, the lowest performing districts do not experience the same high turnover rates (Grissom & Mitani, 2016).

Regardless of the length of superintendent tenure as reported by studies over the last 40 years, there is no denying that tenure prior to the last 40 years was significantly higher than years since. While the job is ever evolving, the major change in the modern area (since approximately 1980) has been the reliance on high stakes accountability as a measure of school reform. Superintendents certainly feel the pressure of a job that has become far too difficult to maintain any semblance of a balanced life (Hall & Difford, 1992). Furthermore, the school boards who hire these superintendents feel these same pressures from the communities who elect them. Citing a study on Satisfaction Theory (Lutz & Iannaccone, 1978), Hall and Difford (1992) clarified that the “basic premise in this theory is that when community dissatisfaction increases, there is greater risk, and in

many instances, near certainty that there will ultimately be an ‘involuntary’ turnover in the superintendency” (p. 4). The next section of this chapter will center on the primary causes of superintendent turnover and position the study on superintendent training and the use of induction programs.

Factors Associated with Superintendent Turnover

Talbert and Beach (2013) state that, “Studies have suggested that superintendents who remain with a particular district over an extended period of time provide stability, predictability, and can have considerable impact on student performance” (p. 33). A review of the literature on turnover reveals that a variety of factors could influence a sitting superintendent to leave the position. Typically, a combination of factors precede a superintendent’s departure (Björk, Browne-Ferrigno, & Kowalski, 2014). The ability to retain a superintendent fosters growth in student achievement and stability for the organization. This position is responsible for the vision and mission of the district as well as the formative goals that guide school level staff (Grissom & Mitani, 2016; Alsbury, 2008; Byrd, Drews, & Johnson, 2006). Conversely, superintendent turnover can be attributed to lower student achievement, stalled progress toward goals, and decreased morale among staff and the community (Grissom & Mitani, 2016; Waters & Marzano, 2006). Grissom and Mitani (2016) found, “The dearth of studies (on turnover) has made establishing patterns in superintendent turnover difficult and limited inquiry into potential policy levers for promoting superintendent retention” (p. 352). The factors highlighted are those associated with an involuntary departure or exerting enough negative pressure to elicit a voluntary departure. Grissom and Andersen (2012) reported that turnover

emanates from factors associated with a school district, including relationships with school board members or from personal factors, including job performance.

School district factors

Not surprisingly, the relationship between school board and superintendent is often a factor in turnover, with Grissom and Andersen (2012) calling this relationship the “central aspect of the superintendency” (p. 1154). Indeed, the superintendent must walk a tightrope between two worlds – the board and the professional teaching staff – and take special care not alienate either side for fear of retribution. Without both factions working in unison, discord matures and can easily thwart progress toward goals, and can jeopardize the superintendent’s employment. Any measure of discontent could have a detrimental impact on the superintendent/board relationship and lead to a parting of ways, either mutually or through termination (Alsbury, 2003; Chaddock, 1999; Johnson, 1981)

Financial shortfall is another factor influencing the turnover of superintendents. Due to financial exigencies, state associations and local boards ask districts to do more with fewer resources. Low salaries and inadequate resources have a negative effect on teacher morale and student achievement (Grissom & Mitani, 2016). The Colorado Association of School Executives (2003) found that lack of funding was a serious threat to the success of the superintendent and the district. Sadly, the financial constraints causing turnover compound the turnover itself. Talbert and Beach (2013) reported:

The price of superintendent turnover can be great – both financially and organizationally. Superintendent and board relationships which are dysfunctional can result in a negative financial impact in the district as well as a

negative impact on staff morale, student achievement, and community support. In addition to superintendent turnover being costly, longevity can also have a positive or negative impact on student achievement. (p. 33)

New to the research on superintendent turnover is an analytical look at salary in relation to likelihood of turnover (Grissom & Mitani, 2016). Grissom and Mitani (2016) reported, “For each increase of \$10,000 in annual salary, we estimate a reduction in the probability that the average superintendent turns over of about 2 to 3 percentage points in our preferred models, a substantively important reduction” (p. 383). They suggest that boards of education offer higher salaries in their pursuit of greater stability.

Personal factors

Of all the personal characteristics of superintendents, experience and age are most often associated with higher rates of turnover (Grissom & Mitani, 2016). This is no surprise given the hierarchy of the profession. School boards draw from applicants who tend to be older and more experienced, rising from the ranks of teachers and school-level administrator. Therein lies the quandary – school districts search for stability that may lead them to a younger, less experienced candidate, but they also desire the experience and credibility of older candidates. This reality, coupled with the impact of salary outlined in the previous section, creates a situation that is difficult to pinpoint as definitive cause and effect (Grissom & Mitani, 2016).

It is possible that superintendents are aging out and retiring, or it could be a response to the demand of the position. Burnout, and life/work balance has been studied in relation to superintendent turnover, with the time needed to perform the duties of

superintendent without compromising health or family relationships identified as another potential factor. Most superintendents in the Commonwealth of Kentucky work on 240-day contracts, which is a misnomer. The job requires around the clock performance and little regard to personal balance. The Colorado Association of School Executives (2003) reported that the superintendent position often requires 80 or more hours a week. The stress of finding work/life balance along with the stresses of external forces such as state and federal mandates creates enough justification for superintendents to leave the position. Johnson (1981) emphasized the ability to delegate authority as a necessary trait but even this ability does not shield the superintendent from the plethora of pressures. In an interview with an anonymous state association executive director, Hall (1992) found abject pessimism when discussing the state of conditions surrounding a superintendent and growing concern for those who attempt to perform the duties as demanded by the position. The director commented, "I am beginning to question, under the current circumstances, with all of the outside demands and the inside interest groups building up their ability to influence, what the job is? Is it doable?" (p. 9).

A superintendent candidate may have all the traits identified by Johnson (1981), but there remains the matter of knowledge. Does preparedness and knowledge positively affect dispositional acumen? This brings us to the crux of this study. A final factor in the turnover of superintendents is professional training. While Glass, Bjork, and Brunner (2000) reported that two-thirds of all superintendents felt competent based on their preparation programs, there has been scrutiny of these programs and whether or not the activities and experiences associated with the programs actually parallel the on-job responsibilities (Farkas, Johnson, & Duffett, 2003). In another study, Johnson (2002)

found that 8 out of 10 superintendents considered their training as inadequate and out of touch with the realities of the position. While 8 out of 10 questioned the effectiveness of the graduate school training, fewer than half (45%) felt that overhauling the system would create better school leaders. A similar percentage (46%) felt that a network of peers would provide a support system that worked to benefit superintendents. There was no data concerning the effectiveness of onboarding or induction programs, giving legitimacy to the purposes of this study.

The phenomenon of perceptions of ineffective training is not new. Reusser and Wochner (1946) concluded, “In an extensive study conducted by the National Education Association, the opinions of 1,300 superintendents in communities with a population of 2500 or more were tabulated from a questionnaire relative to compulsory youth programs. Eighty-five percent of these superintendents favored a more extensive preparedness program than that in prewar years” (p. 314). Three-quarters of a century later, the need for improved superintendent preparation programs still exists in our public school systems.

Mitigating Superintendent Turnover

In this section, I examine the research on efforts to mitigate superintendent turnover, focusing on pre-service training, in-service training, induction, and mentorship. As I will show, there is a dearth of research on new superintendents and initiatives aimed at bolstering acumen during that first year of service (Kowalski, 2003; Kowalski, Petersen, & Fusarelli, 2009). Furthermore, the majority of new superintendents are not placed in support-focused environments where pertinent induction can take place (Tallerico, 2000; Orr, 2006b). Training opportunities for superintendents take place

before and after acceptance of a position. Trainings that occur prior to job acquisition are typically pieces of a university program and lead to state licensure. Any training occurring after acceptance of a position arises as professional development or, in some cases, an articulated induction/onboarding program.

Pre-service training

Despite the fact that 80% of new superintendents consider their pre-service training as effective (Kowalski, et al., 2011), criticisms persist about their true effectiveness. Kowalski et al. (2005) found that critiques of pre-service training programs centered on relevancy of curriculum, with too much attention paid to management as opposed to more appropriate social issues such as poverty, gender, and diverse learners. Without a set of standards, these programs operate on the whims of individual faculty members who have varying ideas of excellence. Research suggests that effective programs offer a balance of theory and practice (Orr, 2006a).

The path to the superintendency typically follows the sequence of teacher to school administrator to district-level administrator to district leader. Along this continuum, candidates gain knowledge and skills through experience. While this background knowledge is important to an overall understanding of the business of public education, simply occupying these positions does not prepare one adequately for the superintendent position. Approved licensure programs and national standards serve to guide program design and recognize quality in preparation programs of superintendents.

Kowalski (2005) reported that all 50 states are tasked with the management of their educational systems, which includes the articulated prerequisites for superintendent licensure. At the turn of the century, only about 80% of the states had defined curriculum

for licensure. Even more troubling is the fact that though states have curriculum in place, more than half allow for waivers that bypass the curriculum and other licensure conditions (Murphy, 2005).

Superintendent preparation programs have fallen under scrutiny for their lack of pertinent content and failure to place candidates in job-specific situations. Johnson (1996) found that “academic content and pedagogical approaches in administrative training programs are regularly reported to be narrow and unimaginative” (p. 286). Hoyle (2004) was especially critical, calling the training received by many pre-service superintendents as nothing more than additional principal preparation, mostly ignoring the day-to-day responsibilities of the more senior position. Similarly, Glasman and Glasman (1997) expressed concern over whether superintendent preparation programs accurately molded learning leaders for the new century. Kowalski (2003) and Fuller et al. (2003) highlighted the need for curriculum that more accurately reflects the responsibilities of acting superintendents, including district demographic and cultural characteristics. For example, they posited that rural districts are greater in number and bring with them challenges that are unique from those in suburban and urban districts.

As a result of educational theorists and researchers calling for sweeping reform in superintendent preparation (Hess, 2003; Hoyle, 2004) at the turn of the century, there is a new emphasis on standards-based competency (Young, Anderson, & Nash, 2017). Currently, curriculum focuses on management of the organization with heavy emphasis on budgeting and tangents to budgeting such as staffing and facilities. In Kentucky, candidates spend a fourth of the preparation program shadowing a mentor who is already in the field. Kowalski et al. (2005) outlined concerns with university-based preparation,

highlighting many flaws in curriculum. They felt that spending too much time on the management side of the position comes at the expense of leadership and instructional development. Murphy (2003) reported that only half of the states require coursework that focused on instructional leadership. Fuller et al. (2003) emphasized that the successful superintendent was well versed in more than management and needed skills in politics, school finance, human resources, and the foundations of leadership. Kowalski (2009) commented that licensure should closely mirror the “realities of practice” and should inform the policies designed to ensure capable superintendents. He also felt that because the majority of districts were rural, licensure should account for the characteristics of those districts as opposed to blanket management skills.

Pre-service programs and licensure, although regularly amended to parallel the political climate, do not seem to have a positive effect on the longevity of public school superintendents. I did find research that extolled the value of mentorships, but this was studied in isolation. Induction programs, while in use in select number of states, have not been analyzed to satisfy the questions of competency and longevity.

In-service professional development

The National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration (1987) issued a report that spotlighted the voices of educational leaders and experts. This report included a number of deficiencies related to the superintendent position, including recruitment of qualified educators and the preparation those educators needed and deserved (Jackson & Kelley, 2002). One of the many recommendations (NCEEAA) was to address the lack of systematic professional development.

Novice superintendents need support in the first year of service to give them a better chance at success. To accomplish this, many states depend upon embedded professional development. These opportunities begin in the first year of service and continue throughout the length of tenure. Along with providing a support network for new superintendents, in-service professional development orients them to the challenges of the position and advances levels of mentoring by experienced superintendents (Orr, 2006b). The level and quality of support and collegiality depends on the state and number of opportunities granted to the district leaders. Antonucci (2012) found that the state association in Massachusetts provides a variety of professional development opportunities for all superintendents, such as leadership academies, a formal mentoring program, and conferences.

Wong (2004) contended that an effective induction program has purpose, components, and structure. For this study, those components were training, support, and retention. The literature suggests that the first two components need to focus on prolonging superintendent tenure and the third being a byproduct of training and the mitigation of numerous external pressures. Along with Massachusetts and Kentucky, other states employ a form of intentional training for superintendents. These programs, despite their differences, aim at retaining effective district leaders.

There are 67 superintendents in the state of Florida, all of whom belong to the Florida Association of District School Superintendents (FADSS). This group of leaders has access to a defined network of colleagues through the Florida Superintendents Leadership Development Program. Per the FADSS website, this program begins with the hire or election of a new superintendent. As the program title indicates, this program

centers on the development of leadership qualities through the New Superintendent Orientation Program. A series of development activities are offered throughout the tenure of each superintendent.

Florida's version of onboarding is the New Superintendent Orientation Program. This program matches those new to the position with experienced school superintendents. Together, they focus on the role in relation to the state requirements as well as the skills needed to fulfill day-to-day responsibilities. Mentoring is in place to increase the likelihood of success, which is the primary component in the first year of service to help "provide superintendents opportunities to increase their understanding of their roles as the chief executive officers of school systems, to acquire information needed to successfully fulfill their responsibilities, and to gain insights from experienced superintendents on successful practices of the superintendency" (FADSS, 2017, "Florida Superintendents Leadership Development Program," para. 2). The mentors used in this arrangement are experienced superintendents in the state who have participated in an intentional training regimen to serve their peers.

The education department in the state of Ohio encourages new superintendents to become members of the Buckeye Association of School Administrators (BASA) to take advantage of their induction programming. One piece is the Ohio School Leadership Institute (OSLI). Established under legislative order in 1993, OSLI is a means of providing ongoing professional development opportunities for state superintendents. Ohio superintendents also have access to the New Superintendent Transition Program, also provided by BASA. This program targets those who are entering the position for the first time. A final piece is BASA's Executive Coaching partnerships. Much like Florida,

new superintendents match with successful, experienced Ohio superintendents, called executive coaches, who are specifically trained to “assist in negotiating the many challenges faced by chief executive officers of school systems” (BASA, 2017, “Programs,” para. 3).

The Texas Association of School Administrators (TASA) governs an academy for first-time superintendents (FTSA) which, as of 2015-16, is in its 24th year. First and second year superintendents convene at four two-day sessions throughout the school year. This academy “is where beginning superintendents go to learn successful practices, understand the complex day-to-day requirements of the position, develop leadership skills unique to the superintendency, and build a network of support” (TASA, 2017, “First-Time Superintendents Academy,” para. 1)

Superintendent induction in Kentucky

By passing the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) in 1990, the Kentucky General Assembly came into compliance with a Supreme Court ruling that the educational system in the state was unconstitutional. KERA brought about wide scale change to the education profession, with curriculum, accountability, and finance as cornerstones of the law. One of the outcomes of the law was the requirement of superintendents to participate in a training program. This program was to include, among other items, components of management, school-based decision-making, school law, and school finance.

For the next 20 years, all new superintendents participated in the program. Over time, the trainings became inadequate as a means to address the needs of district leaders. The responsibilities of the superintendent in the era of reform continued to evolve while

the induction process remained static. Kentucky's commissioner of education wanted wholesale change in the induction program and awarded the opportunity of revision to the Kentucky Association of School Administrators. A team of educators from around the state collaborated to assist in the creation of curriculum for induction (Caldwell & Strong, 2015).

The team of administrators who developed the program worked under the framework of competencies, focusing specifically on tenure as a component of the desired outcomes. The onboarding program aims to get first-year superintendents effectively inducted to improve the results of school districts and to aid in the retention of impactful school leaders (Caldwell & Strong, 2015). Given the format of curriculum development for superintendents, my study helps answer one of the longstanding questions in research on the effectiveness of professional development. There is a clear lack of research on whether professional development can be delivered effectively when those delivering were not involved in the development (Wayne et al., 2008).

Standards. In 1993, the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) developed the Professional Standards for the Superintendency as a template to guide the performance of school leaders. These eight standards provided the foundation for the standards now guiding superintendents in Kentucky. At the turn of the century, The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) developed its own set of standards, known as Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL), to guide school administrators. These standards were revised in 2015. Murphy (2015) wrote in sum, "The knowledge base upon which the (ISLLC) standards were scaffolded, academic press, and productive community, demanded an enlarged treatment of what leaders

should be doing to create schools where inside an environment of care all youngsters reach ambitious targets of academic learning” (p. 726). Much like AASA’s version, the content of these ten standards overlaps the content of Kentucky’s version. Table 1 details the similarities between AASA, PSEL, and KASA standards.

Table 1. *Professional standards comparison*

1993 AASA	2015 PSEL	2015 KASA
Leadership and District Culture	Mission, Vision, and Core Values	Strategic Leadership
Policy and Governance	Ethics and Professional Norms	Instructional Leadership
Communication and Community Relations	Equity and Cultural Responsiveness	Cultural Leadership
Organization Management	Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment	Human Resource Leadership
Curriculum Planning and Development	Community of Care and Support for Students	Managerial Leadership
Instructional Management	Professional Capacity of School Personnel	Collaborative Leadership
Human Resource Management	Professional Community for Teachers and Staff	Influential Leadership
Values and Ethics of Leadership	Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community	
	Operations and Management	
	School Improvement	

The development of the original set of Kentucky superintendent standards emerged from a combination of several resources from the state and national level. These standards sought to guide all school districts regardless of the years of experience of their sitting superintendents. These standards have taken on a new life as the foundation for the new superintendent induction program. As I discussed previously in Chapter II, the standards are closely tied to the superintendent frames coined by Callahan (1966) and Kowalski (2001). I also included a detailed explanation of the standards and

the associated practices from the KASA handbook in Appendix A. This information is important when comparing the desired outcomes of the onboarding program with the responses given by the participants in an effort to answer the research questions.

Context matters when discussing competency in relation to the standards. While the point of national standards was to acknowledge the common practices of superintendents, there also exists the notion of contextual pressures. These standards may be a good starting point for comparisons but are applied in a variety of ways depending on interests of the local community (Bjork, Kowalski, & Browne-Ferrigno, 2014).

Due to the possibility of disclosure in superintendent interviews, it is also worth noting that the standards included personality dispositions woven throughout. There is the prevailing belief that the most effective superintendents possess high-level interpersonal skills with the ability to communicate with all stakeholders. Knowledge is not enough. KASA (2014) contends superintendents are not considered effective “because of *what they know and do* but because of *who they are* shining through their knowledge and skills. These human qualities—core values, beliefs and perceptions—are called dispositions” (p. 31).

Support team. Along with the improved induction program in the fall of 2012, a support team consisting of an executive coach, a mentor superintendent, and a school board member develops an Individualized Learning Plan (ILP) for new superintendents. The sole function of this team is to help the new superintendent navigate the demands of a new position while addressing the needs of the school district. The reasoning behind this simultaneous micro and macro approach was to ensure professional growth of the

superintendent without sacrificing the progress of initiatives or hindering the day-to-day operations of the district.

KASA employed three executive coaches to address the needs of each cohort, meaning each coach was responsible for the ILP of 8-10 new superintendents. These executive coaches were all highly successful superintendents chosen for the position based on their demonstrated effectiveness. The assignment of executive coach to superintendent was based on geographic location. The purpose behind executive coaching is to provide first-time superintendents with the experiences of a seasoned veteran as he/she works on individualized needs. This brand of development builds the new superintendent's capability to achieve short and long-term goals for the school district as defined by the evaluation standards. The executive coach meets with superintendent individually and as part of the ILP team. (Executive Coaching Forum, 2012). "The Executive Coach is responsible for periodic multi-level communication and also serves as the communication conduit between the mentor and the school board, monitoring and reporting progress of all participants in the cohort each quarter with mentors" (KASA, 2014).

Mentor superintendents were also selected according to geographic location as well as mentor-mentee strengths and areas of need. Mentors chosen were volunteers who had demonstrated success in the position for more than two years at a minimum. Most had much more experience, and some were recently retired. The focus of the mentors was to "guide new superintendents through a successful first year, providing a continuum of ongoing support and just-in-time learning. The mentor meets routinely with the new superintendent in person and communicates frequently to provide guidance and counsel"

(Caldwell & Strong, 2015). The KASA (2014) job description provided the overview that “mentors will guide new superintendents through a successful first year. They will intercede, with support from other key in-state individuals, to provide a continuum of support and learning for a positive first year.” Above all else, the mentor/protégé relationship provides the protégé access to valuable networks and tangential working relationships more than specific skill attainment (Alsbury & Hackmann, 2006).

As mentioned previously in this chapter, superintendent and board relations are often cited as a reason for turnover. To ensure a positive relationship, a board member liaison was included as part of the ILP team. This liaison, chosen by the board, works with the executive coach and mentor superintendent to assist the new superintendent in acclimating to the district. The primary focus of the board member is to ensure that the superintendent is aware of any critical community issues. This is especially important in larger districts made of up multiple communities. With this information, superintendents are more likely to make decisions that lead to a cohesive district as well as open avenues for essential discussions in future endeavors (Caldwell & Strong, 2015).

Research on Effective Professional Development

In its simplest form, professional development is a portal to greater competencies in a chosen arena. More specifically, in education, any form of professional development should eventually lead toward advancing student achievement. Communities of people, who share a passion on a common cause, come together and share their thoughts, words, and behaviors in an effort to foster group in self and others (Sargeant, 2009). All of this informs social learning theory (Bandura, 1971) where learning occurs in an environment characterized by observation and both formal and informal interactions. At its best, this

learning should arise from a concentrated backward design model (Guskey, 2014) where outcomes are articulated during design phase and activities are employed with the end in mind.

The majority of research on professional development in education focuses on instructional practice and any resultant student outcomes (Kennedy, 2016; Hill et al., 2013). While advancing student achievement is the ultimate goal of any professional improvement, superintendents are removed from direct instruction. However, perceptions of self-efficacy, improvement, or satisfaction are universal and can be generalized across job descriptions, education or other profession, based on the types of professional development offered. Tzivnikou (2015), using a pre and post research design, found that job-embedded professional development over a period of six months had a positive effect on perceptions of self-efficacy.

Effective professional development can be distilled into five distinct characteristics: content focused, active learning opportunities, coherence with other initiatives, sustained duration, and collective participation (Desimone & Stuckey, 2014; Hochberg & Desimone, 2010). Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) contend that two additional characteristics of professional development enhance the experience for participants and include coaching/support and feedback/reflection to the list. The connection with the role of superintendent is obvious. Content in superintendent induction revolves around the learner standards; active learning opportunities are offered through mentor-protégé meetings; because training occurs during the first year, coherence with initiatives is a must; sustained duration is accomplished with induction being a one to year proposition, depending on state; collective participation is achieved

through cohort models; coaching arrives through mentoring activities; and finally, reflection is an ongoing component of induction culminating in summative evaluations.

On the topic of sustained duration, Yoon et al. (2007) reviewed hundreds of studies that examined the effectiveness of professional development. Of these studies, only nine met the evidence standards from the What Works Clearinghouse, which is a research division of the United States Education Department. Of the nine meeting standards, three were of a duration of 14 hours or less and were found to have no significant effect on student achievement. The remaining six studies were all of duration of 30 to 100 hours of professional development. Five of these six showed a significant effect on student achievement. While Yoon focused on the development of teachers, it is important to relate the sustained duration aspect to my study, where superintendents are subjected to approximately 75 hours of professional development over the course of one school year. Bolstering the claim that prolonged exposure contributes to competency, Ebert-May et al. (2015) found that 86% of post-doctoral fellows who were participants in a two-year professional development cycle produced more pedagogically sound lessons upon completion.

In a mixed-methods study of educators in Australia, Gore et al. (2017) found that the use of professional learning communities had a positive effect on competency as well as a positive impact on morale and a sense of recognition. The professional development approach with these educators was pedagogically based and the effects transcended all demographic factors such as school size and location. Results were consistent among small/large schools and urban/rural schools. Similarly, Girvan et al. (2016) found that

experiential learning as a component of professional development produced outcomes that influenced beliefs and practice, leading to greater competency in the field.

The characteristics of effective professional development work concurrently with the characteristics of adult learners, who bring an advanced set of skills and schema as compared to child learners learning a foreign skill. Adult learners are typically self-motivated and carry a variety of experiences that allow them to make meaning, enabled by thoughtful reflection, the ability to ask pertinent questions, and social interaction (Lambert, 2002). Superintendents need continuous, relevant professional development despite the notion that they are already experts in the field (Mercer & Meyers, 2013) and should be characterized as a continuous feedback loop of the social and political complexities affecting the position (Björk et al., 2005).

Even with the existing research on professional development being clear about effective practices, there still exist problems with implementation. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) consider the disconnect between research and practical implementation “one area ripe for improvement” (p. 22). One targeted area of improvement in professional development research is accurately assessing outcomes (Tooley & Connally, 2016). They suggested being able to answer the question of not “if” but “why” professional development is working and how to adjust that learning for future participants.

Research on Effective Mentoring

Mentoring programs, while used extensively in the workforce, including education, had yet to integrate fully into the superintendent position as recently as the beginning of the 21st century (Alsbury & Hackmann, 2006). In fact, there has been little progress toward defining what mentoring actually means in the field of education

(Dawson, 2014). Connor and Pokora (2012) defined mentoring as the process of personal development through a series of interactions with others resulting in growth. The primary use in education was, and still is, to induct teachers and principals as they navigate their first year in the position. *The First Days of School*, the seminal text by Wong and Wong (2001) is a common go-to for beginning teachers that extols the virtues of a strong mentor-protégé relationship. Any mentoring programs that do exist for first-time superintendents are typically implemented by professional organizations, state departments of education, and universities (Beem, 2007) but are often at the mercy of funding mechanisms or are beset by poor planning (Augustine-Shaw & Hachiya, 2017).

Coaching and mentoring can be considered synonymous for my study. While the appointed relationship of an experienced superintendent with a first-time superintendent is considered a mentor/protégé relationship, the reality is that the mentor engages in coaching opportunities throughout the school year. In the *Executive Coaching Handbook*, Ennis et al. (2015) described mentoring/coaching as “a one-on-one individualized process to benefit the leader and his/her organization. Working with goals defined by both the leader and the organization, a qualified and trusted coach uses various coaching methods and feedback data to develop the leader’s capacity” (p. 8). In relation to the superintendency, the mentoring process is a form of collaboration between the school district, the executive coach, and the first-time superintendent. Ideally, a series of exercises between parties leads to professional growth by the superintendent while simultaneously pursuing district goals.

Ennis et al. (2015) describe three levels of learning for executives: 1. Tactical problem solving, 2. Developing leadership capabilities and new ways of thinking and

acting that generalize to other situations and roles, and 3. “Learning how to learn”: developing skills and habits of self-reflection that ensure that learning will continue after coaching ends (p. 11). All three of these levels are important for a superintendent to develop the competencies associated with the position both in day-to-day operations and for long-term effectiveness.

An authority on mentoring in education, Daresh (2001) surmised that the lack of superintendent mentoring programs was due to the nature of the position. School leaders are viewed as strong, accomplished educators, which contradicts the notion of receiving assistance from a peer. These leaders are more likely seen as the mentor instead of the protégé. This is troubling for female superintendents who sometimes compromise their effectiveness by feigning confidence as opposed to being viewed as weak in a male-dominated position (Kelsey et al., 2014). Daresh (2001) listed some of the dangers of administrative mentoring:

- Although the field of research is growing, the knowledge base on administration is not clear enough to guide a mentoring program;
- Administrators usually must go outside their building or district to find a colleague who is a peer, so they have different needs than teachers for ongoing support;
- New administrators are not new to schools, since they usually have teaching experience, but they do need support in assuming a new role;
- Administrators are the boss, which makes it more difficult to design a support program;

- Administrative peers are not always true equals in influence, which needs to be taken into account. (p. 26)

While the participants in my study are assigned a mentor, the nature of the Kentucky induction program is such that each first-time superintendent is exposed to the teachings from a number of experts during the process. Having a formal mentor does not preclude a relationship with one or more informal mentors that take part in the program. Lee et al., (2006) describe the characteristics of strong mentor-protégé relationships as a series of steps employing both emotional vulnerability and practical coaching advice. They found “for these relationships to be successful, they need a foundation of effective communication, mutual respect and trust, and genuine cooperation. When these ingredients are present, positive outcomes are possible for mentees and mentors” (239).

Xu and Payne (2013) surveyed 472 university faculty members who had participated as a protégé in a mentoring relationship or multiple relationships. They found that the quality of mentors was more important than the number of mentoring relationships in relation to job satisfaction, commitment to the position, and intention to stay long term. Additionally, satisfaction with the mentor was more important than quality or quantity of mentors in relation to the same the categories. Finally, the study validated the notion that “the presence of a mentor or even multiple mentors may not necessarily lead to positive outcomes” (p. 520).

Above all else, induction, including mentoring, accelerates the speed at which a first-time superintendent acclimates to socio-political contexts of the position (Bjork, Browne-Ferrigno, & Kowalski, 2014). This is especially important for female superintendents who are often paired with male mentors. Though females have made

inroads in the superintendent position, there is still a heavy male influence in the direction of mentoring programs, both in development and implementation (McNay, 2016). In the next section, I discuss the necessity of induction and mentoring as the theoretical frame for pushing back against the forces of turnover, instability, and faltering student achievement.

Theoretical Framework

While studies are plentiful on the training of first-time principals, there is a shortage of similar studies on the induction of first-time superintendents. As recently as 2006, Alsbury and Hackmann reported that “no studies could be found concerning the effectiveness of superintendent mentoring programs” (p. 170). They contended that research was needed to identify and evaluate the most critical components of superintendent induction in an effort to achieve the tenure needed to elicit positive change in school districts. Following their lead, I used this gap, and framework, as an opportunity to set baselines for future Kentucky superintendents.

Alsbury and Hackmann (2006) performed a mixed-methods study of Iowa’s mentoring and induction program for superintendents and principals during the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 school years. Their purpose was to set baseline data for the program and offer suggestions for change in any future iterations of delivery. Alsbury and Hackmann also hoped to identify the critical components of induction as voiced by the participants in the study.

Using a 4-point Likert scale, Alsbury and Hackmann found that superintendents reflected positively on their expectations for the induction program (3.39/4) as well as the mentor/protégé relationship (3.85/4). Superintendents also felt more positively about the

use of reflection logs (3/4) than the elementary and secondary principals who were also surveyed. Superintendents were positive about state-wide trainings (3.03/4) but this score was lower than elementary and secondary principals. Alsbury and Hackmann (2006) state that, “Superintendents expressed the highest satisfaction with the overall program and with the mentor/protégé contacts but generally found the least interest in individual program training components” (p. 182).

Existing research on induction programs emphasized the value of mentor/protégé relationships as confirmed by Alsbury and Hackmann (2006). Protégés were clear that the mentoring component was of the highest importance due to the necessity of personal and professional networks to assist in navigating the superintendent position. Alsbury and Hackmann warned that “if the goal of the mentoring program is too narrowly defined as promoting role socialization, novice administrators may not fully develop a personal commitment to continuous professional growth” (p. 183)

Alsbury and Hackmann (2006) provided four recommendations for the design and implementation of induction programs. They recommended early pairing of mentors and protégés, preferably before the beginning of the school year. In addition, this pairing is decided by demographic factors such as gender, philosophical approach, and even geographic location. They also contended that both mentor and protégé undergo simultaneous training activities to bolster their skill sets in working with each other. Finally, they recommended the use of metacognitive strategies as a basis of learning through reflection. It is important to note that all four recommendations are satisfied with the KASA model used for first-time Kentucky superintendents. I could find no

verification that the KASA design team consulted these recommendations prior to the 2012 implementation.

Literature Review Summary

Despite the disparity in the research concerning the length of tenure for superintendents, one piece is clear. Superintendents often leave the position before they have a positive impact on the districts they serve or before they are ready, by way of termination. Research reveals a variety of factors that lead to dissatisfaction and severance. The focus of this study was whether induction programs undertaken during the first year of service have any bearing on perceptions of competency or tenure.

For organizations, the competencies of employees determine the success or effectiveness of the operation. Superintendents enter the profession for altruistic reasons, preparing and training for years prior to assuming the position. Not staying in the profession indicates a disconnect between the person and position. As indicated previously, I theorized that ongoing, intentional supports for new superintendents in the first year of service would positively affect perceptions of competency and longevity.

The studies I referenced in chapter 2 outline the reasons superintendents accept a taxing position, the influences on the job, and why they leave before accomplishing the organizational stability that leads to positive change. Also included was a discussion of the effects of training, including the process required of superintendents in Kentucky.

While job responsibilities and pressures vary from teacher to principal to superintendent, the tenets of preparation and efficacy are consistent predictors of success and longevity across the spectrum of positions. Time constraints would not allow for a 5-10 year analysis of the induction process and turnover rates for new cohort of

superintendents. Existing research on the effects on induction are typically quantitative in nature, with participants using rating scales to determine the effectiveness. I found that these studies focus on the program instead of the participants, which is where my study takes a divergent path. While my study acknowledges the existing quantitative data, my methods are qualitative and attempt to gather a deeper understanding of the effects of induction. Using action research in the vein of Orr's 2007 study to gather information on perceptions served my purposes.

Orr (2007) states that use of an induction program "shows promise for new superintendent development in both the USA and elsewhere, to improve their transition and leadership work" (p. 345). KASA replicated the New York model, providing first-time superintendents with exposure to a curriculum based on standards, but also matching them with experienced leaders who passed along wisdom from their own successes and failures. Orr (2007) advocates for replicating the model but also recommends future research "on the program and its comparative benefits, particularly on its impact on leadership effectiveness and career continuation, and on the ability of replications to yield similar results" (p. 345). Given the lack of research on perceptions of superintendent induction from the perspective of the participants, the KASA model provides an excellent foundation from which to collect data. This information would greatly contribute to the existing body of work as well as provide information to the leadership at KASA as more cohorts enter the program.

The post-program data collected by KASA from the superintendents who completed the induction programming was primarily quantitative. Using Orr's suggestion for further research, I plan to add to the body of work by providing deep,

qualitative data that supplements and extends the findings of KASA in the areas of competency and tenure. The following research questions guide my study:

1. What are the perceptions of competency among first-time superintendents after completion of the onboarding program?
2. In what ways could the onboarding program better prepare superintendents given the realities of on-the-job professional responsibility and objectives of the programming?
3. What are the perceptions of longevity among first-time superintendents after completion of the onboarding program?

Chapter III explores the qualitative methodology used to answer my research questions. My study incorporates the use of qualitative methods to tell the story of how first-time superintendents perceive their competency and longevity in relation to the induction program and how those perceptions change over time. With the primary implication of my study being to inform change on the induction program, data collection and analysis were consistent with the traditions of action research.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of my study is to examine the perceptions of competency and longevity (tenure) of those superintendents who have completed the most recent iteration of the Next Generation Leadership Series. The study engages those superintendents who were participants in Cohort 5 (2016 – 2017) of Next Generation programming. The Kentucky Association of School Administrators (KASA) facilitates the onboarding program, following a manual designed by acting superintendents. I did not seek to undertake an in-depth program evaluation of the onboarding process. Rather, I sought to explore superintendents' perception of self after completion of the process. I provided an account of the experiences of a first-year superintendent who underwent the advanced training they received throughout the year. This training, combined with knowledge gained in pre-service curriculum, theoretically prepares one for the rigors of the position. Participants were asked to reflect on the training and subsequent experiences from their first year on the job through the lens of evaluation standards. The findings from my study may have a positive effect on the design of the onboarding program, and thereby provide future new superintendents with a skill set that fosters confidence in self to meet the challenges of the position. Kentucky's education community has committed to an atmosphere of reform over the last 25 years, and superintendent stability can maximize the effects of this movement.

Research Questions

The following research questions guide my study:

1. What are the perceptions of competency among first-time superintendents after completion of the onboarding program?
2. In what ways could the onboarding program better prepare superintendents given the realities of on-the-job professional responsibility and objectives of the programming?
3. What are the perceptions of longevity among first-time superintendents after completion of the onboarding program?

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research has gained momentum since the turn-of-the-century and is now more readily accepted as a legitimate mode of inquiry in the social, behavioral, and health sciences (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative research is a “situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p.3). My study incorporates the use of qualitative methods to provide an account of how first-time superintendents perceive their competency and aptitude in relation to the induction program and how those perceptions change over time. The goal of my analytical strategy is to examine new superintendents in their natural environment upon the conclusion of their mandated induction process. Qualitative research allows this to occur without removing them from the context of their daily work (Esterberg, 2002) and without controlled variables (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). My study engaged approximately ten first-time superintendents in the Commonwealth of Kentucky. These superintendents come from

different backgrounds and work in districts of varying size, yet they share the same responsibility of completing the onboarding program.

Patton (2002) concluded “the challenge in evaluation is getting the best possible information to the people who need it – and then getting those people to actually use the information in appropriate ways for intended purposes” (p. 13). Using qualitative methods, my study has the ability to inform change at the state level by helping improve the induction program and at the local level by providing superintendents with improved tools to affect student achievement positively. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) and Rossman and Rallis (2003) reported that the purpose of qualitative research was to improve social justice, and my study has the ability to satisfy that claim, gaining social justice for all stakeholders connected to Kentucky’s public schools.

Rossman and Rallis (2003) wrote that there are two distinct features of qualitative research. The first is that the researcher is the means through which the study is conducted, and the second is that the purpose is to learn about some facet of the social world (p. 5). In my exploration of superintendent perceptions and experiences, I served as the sole instrument in the collection and interpretation of data (Stake, 1995).

Crotty (1998) wrote that the key pieces of qualitative research study include methods, methodology, theoretical perspectives, and epistemology. Creswell (2009) wrote that “the conduct of a study includes an introduction to the study, including the formation of the purpose and research questions; data collection; data analysis; report writing; and standards of validation and evaluation” (p. 2). Patton (2002) continued that thought with the understanding that there is no defined process for determining data collection methods. He concluded, “the art of evaluation includes creating a design and

gathering information that is appropriate for a specific situation and particular decision-making context...any given design is necessarily an interplay of resources, possibilities, creativity, and personal judgments by the people involved” (p. 13).

Through interaction with the participants, I hope to gain an understanding of the world in which they work and make subjective meaning of the experiences. This social constructivism (Creswell, 2009) factors in hundreds of occurrences not only with the new superintendent induction program, specifically, but also with a variety of pre-service training, professional development, school district and state level policies, and political influences. As mentioned previously, the use of open-ended questions in social constructivism is integral. Creswell (2009) advocated for the extensive use of open-ended questions because “the researcher listens carefully to what people say or do in their life setting. [Researchers] focus on the specific contexts in which people live and work in order to understand the historical and cultural settings of the participants.” (p. 21)

This study used an interpretive theoretical lens to organize and determine meaning in the data (Anfara & Mertz, 2006). This approach satisfies a need for examining and exploring perceptions of competency and longevity through my actions and interactions with new superintendents as opposed to my preconceived assumptions. By immersing myself in the world of the participants, I was able to better understand their reality. Esterberg (2002) calls this the primary focus of the interpretive lens.

Research Design

For this study, I used an action research design. Action research, a term first coined by MIT professor Kurt Lewin in 1944, is defined by Reason and Bradbury (2001) as “the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more

generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities” (p. 1). My concern is the short tenure of superintendents given their altruism and career-long commitment to attaining the position. Of course, I *am* a superintendent, which makes this pertinent and timely. While I explore my positionality in Chapter IV, it is important to note my relationship with the design of the study. Herr and Anderson (2015) acknowledge the role of researcher/practitioner and the ability to provoke change in a personal context without compromising academic integrity.

In the world of education, action research is often associated with short-term classroom studies where teams of teachers identify problems and work toward solutions, continually revising plans as dynamics change. The four distinct phases of action research (Sagor, 2010) are shown in Figure 1. This form of research connects to the larger issues of democracy and social justice, thereby challenging the belief that research must be objective and impersonal (Brydon-Miller, Greenwood, & Maguire, 2003).

Figure 1. Sagor's four stages of action research.

Over the past 30 years, action research has become a viable research design that has the flexibility to draw upon quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods doctoral studies, with transferability of findings to similar entities (Herr & Anderson, 2005). My study examined past action (Sagor & Williams, 2016) where the findings may inform future superintendents in Kentucky, KASA as the governing body for superintendent induction in Kentucky, and similar programs in other states looking to bolster their efforts in superintendent retention.

I studied the perceptions of ten participants who have experienced the new superintendent onboarding program. This is in line with Polkinghorne (1989), who recommended the study of between 5 and 25 subjects who had lived a similar experience. This recommendation is validated by the work of Orr (2007), who surveyed six superintendents, as well as Bredson, Klar, and Johansson (2011), who interviewed 12 superintendents in a comparison of context-responsive leadership. Creswell (2009) recommended data collection from multiple sources to go along with the in-depth interviews. Data in this study were collected through audio-taped individual interviews and coded for themes, and further compared with primary sources such as the KASA training handbook, performance evaluations, and news articles.

Context of the Study

With a national context in place, I focus this section on the superintendent position in Kentucky. I first inspect the induction program as delivered by KASA, including information on the evaluation standards and support team. While I discuss positionality in Chapter IV, it is important to know that I am currently a practicing superintendent in the state. I am hopeful that my study will provide suggestions on how

to better prepare my superintendent colleagues and to provide increased likelihood of longer, more productive tenures. With student achievement tied to stability, the condition of Kentucky districts would improve with longevity of superintendent tenure.

At the request of the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) and the two largest professional organizations for administrators, the Kentucky Association of School Superintendents (KASS) and the Kentucky Association of School Administrators (KASA), the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) of Appalachia conducted a study of superintendent turnover in the state (Johnson et al., 2011). Easily the most recent and comprehensive study of superintendent tenure ever done in the state, REL worked through the lens of turnover as the enemy of school district improvement measures. They hypothesized that superintendent turnover rates were dependent upon location and demographics.

Finding a dearth of empirical research prior to the onset of the study, researchers from REL were optimistic that their findings would add a much needed piece of information to the field. Examining superintendent turnover in the ten-year period between 1998/99 and 2007/08, the 174 existing school districts fell into one of three categories: 45 districts had no turnover (one superintendent), 82 districts had one turnover (two superintendents), and 47 districts experienced two turnovers (three superintendents). The average tenure of Kentucky's superintendents at 5 years, which was higher than other studies at the turn of the century. It is important to note that I based this average on the number of turnovers in a 10-year period and not an actual mathematical calculation. However, it gives an idea of what was happening in the state.

Because my study focuses on the training aspect of superintendent turnover, the findings of the REL study (Johnson et al., 2011) are important. One of the key findings was that while turnover varied by location and demographic, “the differences did not show patterns strong or consistent enough to suggest systematic differences between rural and non-rural school districts or between Appalachian and non-Appalachian school districts” (p. iv). In short, superintendent turnover has less to do with where you work or with whom you work and is more related to job responsibilities and skill sets. The data on superintendent turnover since the REL study is not encouraging, with over half the districts in Kentucky changing leaders since its conclusion.

In the years 2012 to 2015, over half of Kentucky’s 173 school superintendents left their positions. In addition, at the beginning of the 2017 – 2018 school year, 80 of 162 superintendents have 3 years or fewer in their current district, with nine additional vacancies remaining. As I have commented numerous times in Chapter II, the superintendent role is difficult given the numerous entities to which one must answer. To combat this reality, “it is imperative that new superintendents be successfully onboarded and oriented to their new role as quickly and effectively as possible” (Caldwell & Strong, 2015).

My study reflects the experiences of superintendents from approximately 10 school districts from across the Commonwealth of Kentucky. First-time superintendents in Cohort 5 are from both county districts and independent districts. The student populations in these districts ranged from 200 up to 15,000. These districts are heterogeneous in demographics with varying percentages of free and reduced lunch students and assessment scores.

Beginning with Cohort 1 prior to the 2012 – 2013 school year, first-time superintendents were exposed to the newly designed Kentucky Next Generation Superintendent Effectiveness Standards. These standards were implemented to achieve four distinct outcomes. First and foremost, the standards were meant to help superintendents prioritize their work during the first year of service. The opportunity to become distracted by minutiae is a very real possibility; therefore, adhering to the standards helps alleviate distractions. Next, the standards provide a road map for professional growth. With a performance rubric attached to the standards, superintendents can see areas of strength and weakness. Along with self-evaluation, the standards allow the superintendent's support team to develop an individualized growth plan around the competencies. Lastly, the standards allow the support team to make a decision on the superintendent's worthiness and capability to continue in the position.

While the new superintendent induction program evolves ever so slightly each year, the first five cohorts of the newest iteration were exposed to almost identical programming, with the exception being a formal handbook created before the launch of Cohort 4. As mentioned in Chapter II, superintendents in Cohorts 3, 4, and 5 were evaluated on standards that included a name change for two of the seven standards, with External Development Leadership becoming Collaborative Leadership and Micro-Political Leadership becoming Influential Leadership.

Data Sources

For my study, I used two primary sources of information. The bulk of the information gathered in the study was comprised of formal interviews with participants

from Cohort 5. In addition, superintendent induction documents were scrutinized for comparison of intended purpose and eventual outcomes.

As is often used in qualitative research, I employed purposeful sampling for the recruitment of participants for this study. This involves selecting research participants according to the needs of the study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Patton (2002) believed that the strength and integrity of purposeful sampling “lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term purposeful sampling” (p. 169).

When selecting participants, I sought to gather a wide range of perspectives and experiences. To determine the pool of willing participants, I sent a blanket email (Appendix B) to superintendents in Cohort 5 asking for volunteers. Those who volunteered came from diverse settings, both in geographic area and student demographics, almost completely satisfying my goal of maximum variation sampling. Creswell (2009) describes maximum variation as “a sampling strategy to represent diverse cases and to fully describe multiple perspectives about the case” (p. 129). Patton (2002) defines the use of maximum variation sampling as “capturing and describing the central themes or principal outcomes that cut across a great deal of participant or program variation” (p. 172). The goal of maximum variation sampling is to engage a population so diverse that the results will better represent the entire population as a whole. To the extent possible, I included superintendents from all geographic locations and from a variety of demographics (e.g., FILL).

At the beginning of the 2016 – 2017 school year, 25 Kentucky school districts employed a superintendent who was new to the position in that district. Of those 25, 18 were first-time superintendents and took part in an induction program as part of their mandated training. The demographic makeup of those superintendents is in Table 2.

Table 2. *Demographic makeup of Cohort 5, 2016 – 2017*

Superintendent	Gender	District Type	District Location	Approximate Enrollment
1	F	Independent	Rural	700
2	M	County	Suburban	5000
3	M	Independent	Rural	400
4	M	Independent	Suburban/Rural	3000
5	M	County	Rural	2600
6	F	County	Suburban/Rural	15000
7	F	County	Suburban/Rural	6800
8	M	Independent	Rural	400
9	M	Independent	Rural	500
10	M	County	Rural	2300
11	M	County	Rural	3800
12	M	County	Rural	2100
13	M	County	Rural	1900
14	M	County	Suburban	12500
15	M	Independent	Urban/Suburban	700
16	M	Independent	Suburban	200
17	M	Independent	Urban	200
18	F	Independent	Suburban/Rural	800
	4 Female 14 Male	9 County 9 Independent		

Participants in my study accounted for over half of the population in Table 2, with my goal being at least ten superintendents. As mentioned earlier, the participants came from a combination of maximum variation and purposeful sampling. Given the objective of optimal maximum variation, the matrix in Table 3 shows the ideal selection pattern of participants.

Table 3. *Ideal maximum variation of participants considering demographics*

Participant	Gender	District Type	District Location	Possible Participants from Table 2
1	F	County	NA	6, 7
2	F	Independent	NA	1, 18
3	M	County	Rural	5, 10, 11, 12, 13
4	M	County	Rural	5, 10, 11, 12, 13
5	M	Independent	Rural	3, 4, 8, 9
6	M	Independent	Rural	3, 4, 8, 9
7	M	County	Suburban	2, 14
8	M	Independent	Suburban	15, 16
9	M	NA	Urban	17
10	F/M	Any	Any	Any

Ideally, there would have been complete coverage of male/female, county/independent, and rural/suburban/urban. The ten superintendents who volunteered after receiving the blanket email almost satisfied the desired sampling with one exception. A male from a suburban, independent district replaced one male from a rural, independent district. Table 4 displays the ten participants and the district type and locale.

Table 4. *Participant demographics*

Gender	District Type	District Location
F	County	Suburban
F	Independent	Rural
M	County	Rural
M	County	Rural
M	Independent	Rural
M	Independent	Suburban
M	County	Suburban
M	Independent	Suburban
M	Independent	Urban
M	County	Suburban

Data Collection

I conducted the interviews with the ten participants in the summer and fall of 2018. These interviews took place at a location determined by the participants to

minimize my position as superintendent and become primarily a researcher. Rapport was much easier to establish by visiting the participants at their location as opposed to hosting them in my office. Having superintendent experience myself likely improved my ability to build rapport with the informants. In the event that travel prohibited purposeful sampling, I conducted the interviews by phone or Skype. I was willing to risk this to put the participants at ease, as trust and rapport are essential (Seidman, 2006). The pilot calibration interview allowed me to set a baseline on depth of responses. I also asked for permission to audiotape. These in-depth, semi-structured interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes to one hour. In the findings, I did not use the real names of superintendents and districts and, instead, assigned pseudonyms, such as P1, representing Participant 1.

I also conducted interviews with five veteran superintendents who served as mentors in the induction program centered on the Next Generation Standards. Interviews with this group of superintendents provided a comparison of perceptions of competency at the conclusion of the first year of service. These perspectives added a layer of depth to the study and informed those responsible for the design of the induction program. I also protected these participants with designations, such as M3, representing Mentor 3.

Finally, I interviewed the Center for Education Leadership Executive Director/Deputy Executive Director of the Kentucky Association of School Administrators (KASA) to gain perspective on the objectives of the induction program and how those objectives come to fruition in day-to-day operations. One of the many benefits of this study is the opportunity for informal evaluations of these objectives

against the reflections of first-time superintendents, as this could bring about positive change for future cohorts.

To answer the research questions fully, my interview questions were open-ended and elicited responses that required the participant to be metacognitive and reflective. There were discussions of the participants' perceptions of competency prior to the induction program and how those perceptions change over the course of the first year. Appendix C contains the primary questions that I used with first-time superintendents during the semi-structured interview. Probing questions were used dependent on the context of the answers given and varied slightly among participants. Appendix D contains the questions used with experienced, mentor superintendents and Appendix E contains the questions used with the Center for Education Leadership Executive Director. At the conclusion of the in-depth interviews, the data were organized into broad categories and prepared for coding. The coding process revealed deeper descriptions which were classified into themes and patterns.

Throughout the process of collecting data, there were numerous documents, which I did not manipulate in any way. These documents were pre-existing pieces of information that provided triangulation of other gathered information. I scrutinized and evaluated the existing information for themes through the process of document analysis. Bowen (2009) stated this procedure "entails finding, selecting, appraising (making sense of), and synthesizing data contained in documents" (p. 28). Although document analysis is used as the lone methodology in some studies, its purpose in my qualitative study was to complement the interviews. Hofmeister et al. (2018) found that document analysis "is particularly valuable for in-depth analysis of case series so that meaning and

understanding about the case can be extracted. Document analysis produces data in the form of excerpts and quotations, which are organized into themes” (p. 346).

All recordings were retained according to University of Louisville policy. Any summary interview content, or direct quotations from the interviews, that are made available through academic publication or other academic outlets will be coded so that participants cannot be identified, and care will be taken to ensure that other information in the interviews that could identify participants is not revealed.

Data Analysis

A common theme among published qualitative researchers is that there is no one specific manner in which to conduct the research and analyze the data. Rossman and Rallis (2003) use a metaphor of a child’s playroom to describe the process of data analysis. The toys in this playroom could be dolls, trucks, puzzles, etc. One could group toys by color or by function or by levels of enjoyment depending on the mood or purpose. Data are no different. Like the toys in the analogy above, one may categorize and sort data any number of ways to get a true picture of their meaning. Each grouping allows for a different perspective, which provides depth in the study.

In this dissertation, I used a process of analysis noted by Crabtree and Miller (1992) that mirrors the four phases of action research (Sagor & Williams, 2016). Crabtree and Miller contend that the process of conducting qualitative research is embedded in Shiva’s circle of constructivist inquiry (Figure 2). In this model, I entered with sensitivity to the subject, looking for no certain truths. An explanation or theory (outside of the circle) was made as I worked through the data with inductive analysis and coding. This definition of inductive analysis parallels that of Strauss and Corbin (1998),

who detailed, “The researcher begins with an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data” (p. 12). My purpose with this inductive approach was to allow explanations to emerge from the dominant themes found in the collected data, without the constraints levied by more structured methodologies (Thomas, 2006).

Figure 2. Shiva's circle of constructivist inquiry.

Qualitative Validity

Creswell (2009), concluded validity is the extent to which a research instrument measures its intended purpose to draw conclusions. In my study, the questions I asked the participants in the formal interviews correspond to the research questions. As previously mentioned, I conducted a pilot, formal interview with a veteran superintendent to ensure credibility. Piloting interviews with an authority is an acceptable technique used to determine an instrument's credibility (Litwin, 1995).

Though my literature review drew from results all over the United States, there must be some caution taken with transferability to other states. Kentucky's superintendent induction program is specific to the legislation enacted by the general assembly, and the program is tightly bound to other legislation in the commonwealth, including school governance and accountability measures. Though Kentucky's induction program is based on national standards, it draws heavily from Kentucky's state context and political landscape. These same politics threaten the dependability of the study, as the political landscape has changed dramatically in the months leading up to data collection. Specifically, the training that those in Cohort 5 received most likely did not prepare them for the pension reform movement nor the potential impact of budget/tax reform. Both of these developments gained momentum in the summer of 2017 and likely played a significant role in the perceptions of competency and longevity of the superintendents.

Limitations

A potential threat to the validity of my study is my role as superintendent, which I discuss in the next section. A method I used to confirm the data was to have the participants review the transcripts from the interviews and clarify any of their words through member checking (Levitt et al., 2018). Member checking, in the form of transcript reviews, took place prior to any data analysis.

I am a first-time superintendent who participated in Cohort 3 during the 2014 – 2015 school year. Because of this, any member of Cohort 5 may have a preconceived notion of my own personal beliefs, but this had no bearing on the purpose of the study nor the questions asked as part of the interview process. To mitigate the influence of my

position within the study, I used Milner's (2007) cultural positionality framework. This framework guided me in navigating "seen, unseen, and unforeseen dangers in the practice of their (my) inquiry: researching the self, researching the self in relation to others, engaged reflection and representation, and shifting from self to system" (p. 395). I undertake an in-depth exploration of my positionality in Chapter IV.

Lastly, most of new superintendents in Cohorts 5 are male. While I attempted to engage as many females as possible, the superintendency remains a leadership role dominated by white males (McNay, 2016). Noted in the discussion is that caution should be taken when likening the male experience to female superintendents.

Given the depth of the research and the number of subjects interviewed, researchers have the ability to include this information into further studies (Guba & Lincoln, 1988). Despite the limitation of the study, the results seek to inform state policy and future amendments to the Next Generation Leadership series. In addition, the findings may be significant enough to impress change on higher education superintendent licensure programs.

Ethical Considerations

The nature of qualitative research implies access to confidential information as the researcher attempts to make meaning from the interviews of the participants. While the line of questioning outlined in Appendix C seems innocuous, the potential existed for sensitive information to surface. The pressures of the superintendency are numerous, creating the potential for an interview to take an unexpected turn. I ensured open communication with the participants in relation to the purpose of the research, confidentiality, consent, and use of the findings. (Moustakas, 1994). It is important to

note that the participants volunteered to be part of the study upon my blanket or direct request.

I provided protections to the participants in this study through following the human subjects' guidelines established by the International Review Board (IRB) at the University of Louisville. Prior to each interview, the participant read and signed a consent form (Appendix F). I maintained the anonymity of the participants by using pseudonyms in subsequent chapters. Any future use of this research will also include pseudonyms to protect confidentiality.

Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the basic tenets of qualitative inquiry along with the theoretical perspective from which I worked. Discussion addressed the design of the research, including information on the setting and the participants. I also included the process of data collection and analysis, including my role as the primary instrument.

Chapter IV presents the findings of my research with analysis of the in-depth interviews and the themes that emerged from the research. Chapter V presents a discussion of my findings and the significance of the research as it relates to the potential development of policy and the structuring of superintendent preparation programs. Recommendations for future research are also included.

CHAPTER IV: ANALYSIS

The purpose of my qualitative study was to examine Kentucky's superintendent induction program, examining the participants' perceptions of the program in terms of increasing their competency and likelihood of longevity (tenure) in the district leadership role. Using an action research qualitative design, I studied the perceptions of ten participants who experienced the new superintendent onboarding program in 2016-2017. To make meaning from the in-depth interviews, I used an interpretive theoretical lens. Three research questions guided my study:

1. What are the perceptions of competency among first-time superintendents after completion of the onboarding program?
2. In what ways could the onboarding program better prepare superintendents given the realities of on-the-job professional responsibility and objectives of the programming?
3. What are the perceptions of longevity among first-time superintendents after completion of the onboarding program?

Data analysis methods were consistent with Sagor's four phases of action research (2010) and embedded in Shiva's circle of inquiry (Crabtree & Miller, 1992). Throughout my study, data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously following Miles and Huberman (1994) and Strauss and Corbin (1998). As such, codes and themes began to develop during and after superintendent interviews. Once I completed interviews with

mentor superintendents, the KASA Deputy Executive Director, and mined documents for triangulation, I sought to confirm the consistent themes that had emerged throughout data collection and coding. I achieved validity by revising the questions after pilot interviews. I removed one question due to redundancy and amended another one to elicit open-ended responses. The answers I was getting were narrow in scope.

Positionality

Reflexivity is a critical component of qualitative research, and given my professional position, it was imperative that I articulate my place within the study. Guillemin and Gillam (2004), defined reflexivity as a “reflection of how the researcher constructs knowledge from the research process – what factors influence the researcher’s construction of knowledge and how these influences are revealed in the planning, conduct, and writing up of the research” (p. 275). Reflexivity ensures credibility and minimizes the possibility of contamination of the research (Berger, 2015).

Though best known for his work on critical race theory, Milner (2007) published a nonlinear framework for educational researchers that is sensitive to issues of culture, awareness, and positionality. Milner contended one must examine four interrelated components of cultural consciousness in relation to a researcher’s positionality. Those components – researching the self, researching the self in relation to others, engaged reflection and representation, and shifting from the self to system – are discussed further in this section. Milner’s contention with this framework is that “how education research is conducted may be just as important as what is actually discovered in a study” (p. 397). To explore thoroughly and purposefully each of the four components, Milner offered a

series of questions that a researcher could ask oneself. In the subsequent sections, I used one or more of his questions to explore my positionality.

Researching the self

The most important concept in this component was my own background and how I viewed the research given this background. More specifically, would my own experiences have a profound effect on my ability to determine importance in the study? Moreover, would I even know if my experiences affected my own perceptions of outcomes? To ensure pure conclusions, I had to use metacognitive strategies and reflect on my assumptions and biases that could have compromised the study.

I am a Kentucky superintendent in my fifth year of service. Prior to my role as researcher, I was a participant in the superintendent induction program as a member of Cohort 3 during the 2014-2015 school year. Four years have elapsed since I participated in my own superintendent induction experience and remember my experiences in the program. However, I had never analyzed my participation through the lenses of competency or longevity that are used in my study. I am in my 24th year of education and currently serve as a Kentucky superintendent in a small, independent urban district. Prior to this position, I served as a teacher, principal, and central office administrator in three large, suburban districts. I held no position of authority over any of the participants and was overt in the recruitment correspondence that my role was as a researcher rather than a peer, although most knew me as a fellow superintendent either by name or through professional associations and/or meetings.

To both satisfy my curiosity and to expose any biases I may have carried into the study, I answered the interview questions prior to engaging the participants. Upon

reflection, I found that my attitude toward induction was much more positive four years after completion than it would have been immediately following completion of the program. Forcing myself to revisit that timeframe made me realize how the prevailing tone of the time was survival. As a first year superintendent, there is an inordinate amount of information assimilated in a short time period. My personal experience was feeling the constant pressure of trying to prioritize in an effort to feel successful. It became apparent that sifting away lesser important items from the critically important was at the crux of my insecurities. In that moment, the on-the-job learning seemed much more valuable than the classroom learning associated with the induction program. At times, induction seemed more like hoop jumping than preparatory learnings. It was later, after surviving for a year or so that the value of the in-person classroom instruction became evident. The foundational teachings of induction gave me the confidence to address the presented challenges, and if the teachings did not, the network of professionals made available to me, did. These newfound colleagues – cohort member, mentors, and coaches – proved to be incredibly valuable to my maturation as a superintendent.

Researching the self in relation to others

Because I am a fellow superintendent and of the same professional culture as the participants, it could have been advantageous or disadvantageous for me as a researcher to interpret the findings of the interviews (Milner, 2007). Advancing the field of research concerning superintendent perceptions of competency and longevity demanded that I consider my commonalities with the participants, my experiences in the position, and my reflections of the onboarding process as a means to mitigate any biases or filters I brought

to the study. It was imperative that my own interests did not cloud the truths or experiences of the participants. To understand myself in relation to the others, I focused on two points of emphasis.

Understanding how each of the participants' individual backgrounds shaped their view of the induction process was the first point, meaning I had to consider my own background and experiences in comparison to theirs. I completed my superintendent pre-service training through on-campus coursework in a traditional program at a large state-funded university. My administrative experience was at the middle school level where I was a principal for seven years and included two years of central office experience as a grade level director. I was never an assistant superintendent, nor did I have assigned duties that were purposefully preparing me to be a superintendent.

The second point I considered at Milner's (2007) behest was the "social, political, historical, and contextual nuances and realities" (p. 395) that shaped our understanding. The most prominent of these was the changing political landscape in the period of my induction to that of the participants. In November of 2015, the citizens of Kentucky elected a Republican majority in both chambers of the state general assembly along with a Republican governor. Participants in Cohort 5 were welcomed to the position by an already-determined state budget that reflected the wishes of the party and viewed as unfriendly to public education. The nuances of state budgeting and other legislation would be too lengthy to discuss in this study, but it was important for me to consider these factors as I reflected on my positionality in comparison to the participants. As revealed in the interviews, induction took on a much different tone for Cohort 5 than what I experienced. I examined this change in tone later in this chapter.

Engaged reflection and representation

Distilled to its most basic form, this piece of the framework honored the differing perceptions of experience between the participants and me. In addition, it also acknowledged the difference of experience between participants. Milner (2007) described these relationships positing, “researchers and participants in a study may interpret an experience or an interaction in very different ways, depending on the life worlds, phenomenologically speaking, of those conducting and involved in the research” (p. 396).

As mentioned previously, the political climate in Kentucky shifted substantially over the last four years, particularly between the time I experienced induction and when the study participants experienced induction. In no way did this study focus on political beliefs but many of the interviews leaked into the political realm as a tangent to job responsibilities and the competencies associated with those responsibilities. In fact, one of the superintendent evaluation standards is influential leadership, invoking the necessity to be politically active at the local, state, and national levels as an advocate of the profession.

It was highly likely that personal political beliefs of the participants fell on both sides of prominent issues. Along with funding deficits and school safety concerns, there were changes in accountability and the push for charter schools (eventually passed) and tax-credit scholarships (not passed). Within the themes that emerged from the data analysis, there was never total consensus among the participants. Presented in this chapter is a wide variety of perspectives. All of the participants’ perspectives were included to emphasize the variety of experiences and to enrich the discussion.

Shifting from self to system

The final piece of this framework required me to position the study in the historical context of superintendent induction, honoring the evolution of the program beginning with educational reform mandates of the early 1990s to today. As the social and political contexts changed over the last 30 years, the superintendent responsibilities and competencies changed as well. As I mentioned in the literature review, Kowalski (2005) dubbed the modern day superintendent a communicator, moving on from the social scientist era. Milner (2007) suggested that I acknowledge how the backgrounds of every participant contributed to their views of superintendency and helped shape the data.

In order to understand thoroughly how the participants' responses to the interview questions were informed by the historical context of superintendent induction, I also interviewed five superintendents who served as mentors. These mentors were all accomplished superintendents with an average tenure of just over seven years. Two of the five had experienced induction prior to the program overhaul in 2012.

All of the interviews with program participants and mentors contained questions of background and experience. Discussion included total number of years in education, both teaching and administrative, and the individual paths leading to the superintendency. These paths gave insight into how participants viewed the profession. To strengthen the discussion, I asked participants where they see themselves in the future, adding a layer of contextual reflection and insight into how they may have internalized the state of education over the course of their careers. The emotional toll of working in public education surfaced in a couple of the interviews and quickly became an item under consideration for further study. I discuss this further in the next chapter.

Summary

By making my positionality overt, I sought to mitigate the influence of who I am as a professional, scholar, and individual may have on my findings. My path to the superintendency did not give me the ability to understand others' paths, only the historical context from which they matriculated. I was not able to speak to others' experiences, only report them. Simultaneously, I had to accept that my position and experiences gave me a unique perspective to inform my interpretations of the participants' perception of onboarding. This intersection of researcher and practitioner did not make the roles quantitative equals, but ensured informed investigation. Milner's framework allowed me "to consider dangers seen, unseen, and unforeseen" (p. 388).

Program Objectives

The findings of this study are rooted in the comparison of program objectives with the experiences of first-time superintendents, and if that intersection of theory and practice led to positive perceptions of competency and longevity. Along with interviews of mentee superintendents (n=10) and mentors (n=5), I also interviewed Rhonda Caldwell, the Deputy Executive Director of KASA, and analyzed documents, such as the onboarding manual for a deep understanding of the program's objectives. The remainder of this section outlines what I unearthed from these sources and provides additional context for the findings from superintendent interviews.

Through an intentional mix of in-person training sessions, mentorship, and on-the-job experience, first-time superintendents have had the opportunity to grow professionally and personally. Caldwell and Strong (2015) defined this as "an extensive onboarding process that provided deeper knowledge levels, broadened skill sets, practical

application, and dispositions for leadership based on seven effectiveness standards for superintendents” (p. 36). Dr. Caldwell collected quantitative data on the program, including Cohort 5. I share these data later in this chapter, and the results suggest a positive experience among the mentorship experience. Dr. Caldwell reported that it has been her personal mission to make Kentucky’s version of the onboarding program the best in the nation.

Creating and retaining a talented pool of superintendents is the primary goal of the induction program. Dr. Caldwell commented, “It is the leader who determines the culture of the organization, and ultimately the success of the organization.” While every superintendent has participated in some iteration of induction, those showing high levels of competency also have served as mentors or advisors to the program, thereby perpetuating the cycle of professional improvement. With each successful superintendent, the pool of professional resources becomes deeper, offering services to those who may need it most. In addition, many superintendents acquire the requisite knowledge or skills to volunteer for leadership roles in state and national organizations such as KASS, KASA, or AASA. According to Dr. Caldwell, this idea of professional mentorship and advocacy has been one of the successes of the program.

Expanding on the notion of continuous improvement, the faculty of the onboarding program consist of many current and former superintendents. The basis of selection of mentors considers prior experience, their strengths, and the ability to relate to newcomers in an engaging manner. As I relayed earlier in this chapter, the expectation is that first-time superintendents grow in knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Those delivering the content are held to this same high expectation also. Understanding adult

learner styles and needs is critical to the successes and challenges of the induction program. The superintendency is not a passive receptor position and become increasingly demanding over time (Kowalski et al., 2011).

While competencies of the superintendent standards define the mission of the induction program, longevity in the position is a more complex relationship. When asked about the tenure of superintendents, Dr. Caldwell pointed to factors discussed in the literature review; namely, the role of school boards and their work relationship. She felt it imperative that school boards understand their role as it pertains to the business of a school district. The lack of sufficient board training, coupled with an inexperienced superintendent, could be an unintentional commitment to failure. One of the three executive coaches commented:

The success of the superintendent is mostly about the right fit. A person looking for a job must understand the needs of the district and the culture of the district before committing to an application. He or she needs to determine if personal strengths can contribute to the success or the characteristics of the school district.

The induction program lasts one academic calendar year. Superintendents gave conflicting responses about the time commitment, with some lamenting the number of days out of district and some relaying that the program could benefit from a second year. Regardless, superintendent responses on program surveys have been exceedingly positive, showing that confidence in the competencies is relatively high after one year. In the next section, I analyzed the post-program survey results provided by KASA.

Quantitative Data

At the conclusion of the induction program, superintendents finalized items in the ILP and made a presentation to their boards about progress. In addition, they completed a post-program survey on perceptions of the program and their effectiveness in the knowledge, skills, and dispositions associated with the competency standards. I displayed the results of this survey in Table 5. I used this data for two purposes. First, this data gave me a baseline understanding of perceptions of competency among first-time superintendents, and second, this data allowed me to triangulate the information gathered in the interviews. KASA personnel, mentors, and participants all arrived with very different lenses, which allowed the quantitative data to act as a validity measure.

The post-program survey asked superintendents to reflect on a series of 16 statements. Six of these statements were perceptions of the induction program and ten statements were perceptions of personal effectiveness. Participants scored themselves on a four-point Likert scale with 1 being the lowest value (strongly disagree) and 4 being the highest value (strongly agree). A survey with no neutral score is a forced choice scale. I did not inquire if this was an intentional maneuver; however, I acknowledged this could have contributed to the consistent mean scores found in the results of the survey. KASA personnel found a mean score for each statement. The results shown in Table 4 represent the entirety of the 18 first-time superintendents in Cohort 5.

Table 4. Cohort 5 post-induction survey results

Questions about the program	Mean Score 1-4
The onboarding program assisted me in effectively managing the daily operations of my school district as a first-year superintendent.	3.61
The onboarding program assisted me in effectively leading my school district as a first-year superintendent.	3.78
The onboarding program assisted me with integrating my ILP and knowledge/skills gained through the program into my daily leadership practices.	3.39
My executive coach guided me through a successful first year, providing a continuum of ongoing support, just-in-time learning, and input and guidance on critical matters of district leadership.	3.89
My mentor guided me through a successful first year, providing a continuum of ongoing support, just-in-time learning, and input and guidance on critical matters of district leadership.	3.72
The faculty and program curriculum adequately prepared me to lead my school district effectively in year two.	3.67
Questions about my effectiveness	Score
I am confident I possess the skills needed to implement the effective use and management of resources so that priority is given to support student learning.	3.72
I am confident I know how to use data about our school climate to improve school culture in ways that promote staff and student morale.	3.78
I understand community relations models that are needed to create partnerships with business, community and institutions of higher education.	3.67
I can make sound decisions and am able to explain them based on professional, ethical and legal principles.	3.83
I am confident in my ability to identify additional resources to assist all individuals in my district.	3.78
I am confident I understand and can communicate to staff the complex instructional and motivational issues that are presented by a diverse student population.	3.67
I am confident in my communication abilities to lead in a variety of educational settings.	3.89
I am confident that I create a community of inquiry that challenges the community to repurpose itself by building on the district's core values and beliefs about the future and developing a vision.	3.56
I understand the process of curriculum design, implementation and evaluation.	3.78
I have a clear sense of my own personal development needs and the resources I can access to address those needs.	3.89

Anonymized surveys meant I had no ability to extract the ten participants in my study from the 18 who participated in the survey. However, there were only two occurrences in

the entire survey where a superintendent gave a perception score of less than a 3. Both of those occurrences were scores of 2 and appeared on the same statement. Therefore, I felt comfortable using the data as an accurate reflection of the perceptions of the ten superintendents included in my study. Mean scores from my ten participants would be slightly different than what is shown in the table but accuracy was not my goal for inclusion. Extracted mean scores from my participants would remain between 3 and 4 on the 1-4 scale

Mentor Perspectives

Peers hold experienced superintendents who have volunteered to serve as mentors to first-time superintendents in high regard. Yet, attempting to locate a comprehensive list of those who have served as mentors proved to be a difficult challenge. In addition, with the yearly turnover rate averaging around 15%, many who had served as mentors were retired or had moved on to new positions. With no preconceived notion of who may volunteer to participate, I sent out an email on the superintendent listserv asking for volunteers. I had six replies expressing interest with one later deciding that his experiences did not qualify for the perspective I needed in the study. I interviewed all five remaining.

The mentor superintendents had a combined 123 years in education for an average of 24.6 years. Of those years, they averaged just over seven years as superintendent, with a range of six to 10 years. Four of the mentors were male and one was female; three worked in independent districts and two worked in county districts; all five served as a principal at some point before becoming a superintendent; four identified as being a secondary teacher and one taught at the elementary level.

From the mentor interviews, three dominant themes emerged in the data (Table 5). All had concerns with the current state of the position as it related to the climate of the profession. Sub-topics in this theme included the myriad of external political pressures along with board of education relationships. A second theme was more hopeful. Despite the concerns influencing longevity, all mentors offered suggestions on how to contribute to greater competencies and longer tenures. Finally, I extracted a third theme of motivation from the interviews. More specifically, I sought to explain why educators perform the duties of superintendent in light of the stressors. I begin with this theme to provide a backdrop for the turnover-causing disconnect between why educators pursue the superintendent position and why they often leave before realizing their goals.

Table 5. Mentor superintendents' perception of the position

Theme	Code	M1	M1	M3	M4	M5
Motivation	Provide leadership	X	X	X	X	X
	Stability for the profession	X	X		X	X
	Knowledge & skills	X			X	X
Burdens on the first-time superintendent	Time away from district	X	X	X		X
	Board relations	X	X	X	X	
	External influences	X	X			X
Suggestions for improved competency & longevity	Variety of pre-superintendent experiences		X	X		X
	Induction focus on finance		X	X	X	X
	District-community connection	X	X	X	X	
	Assembling a cohesive team	X	X	X		

Interestingly, four of the five mentors had aspirations of becoming a superintendent with the exception being M2 who commented, “I really had never intended to be a superintendent. I enjoyed being an assistant superintendent because I liked the role of assessment, accountability, and instruction, and being in classrooms.” This revelation from M2 underscored the notion of the current superintendent-as-

communicator era and though instructional leadership as one of the seven competency standards, this comment opened the possibility that preferential treatment was given to the competencies associated with management. I explored this idea of purpose by asking mentors why they pursued the superintendency and, furthermore, why they decided to serve as a mentor?

Motivation

Formally, one has to achieve the certification to be a superintendent by way of a minimum four-course sequence from an accredited university. However, achieving certification does not answer why educators choose to pursue it, nor does having the knowledge or skills required of the position, although those pieces are critical for any success. “Why” is intrinsic, with the challenge of leadership emerging as a primary theme among the mentors I interviewed.

As I mentioned previously, four of the five mentors had aspirations of being the district chief, with M4 and M5 motivated by the challenges associated with leading. One mentor, M3, took the challenge of leadership further, considering it almost an obligation. This mentor was adamant that leadership is akin to a biological trait, stating:

[Leadership] is something that has always kind of driven me. I knew early on as a classroom teacher I was just kind of driven to do more. I love education. I think, you know, you either have a knack for being a leader or you don't, and, I feel that I can make decisions that directly impact kids at a greater level.

Even M2, who did not necessarily aspire to be a superintendent, still felt the call to meet the challenge of leadership. Context matters, and having the knowledge, skills,

and dispositions at the right place and time led to M2 accepting the position despite any misgivings. M2 summed up this situation of accepting the job:

I knew the culture of the district. I knew the people. I trusted them, and I think they trusted me. And so, for me, it's all about making sure you have the right team of people and that you're in a place that you care about that also cares about you, that has the same goals for students and very student-centered.

The reasons for becoming a mentor closely mirrored the reasons for originally becoming a superintendent: the challenge of leadership, the opportunity to give back to the profession, and possession of the skills and dispositions to lead adults. However, the one reason that was consistent among the mentors was the sense of obligation to provide stability to districts. This was a double-pronged loyalty; loyalty to colleagues and the profession and loyalty to employees and families in the home district.

First, it was a show of appreciation for their own mentors. M2 commented, "I knew how hard it was and I knew that my mentor helped me. Being able to call someone you trust is a huge relief." M3 expanded on that notion, recalling time as a mentee and having open and honest conversations with a mentor. "Having real world, real life dialogue with folks is critical," said M3 when asked about motivators. M4 realized the great amount of turnover in the position and saw being a mentor as a way to "pay it forward" to the next generation of superintendents.

The second form of loyalty arose in the form of a relationship with the fraternity of superintendents. With only 173 school districts in the state, superintendents lean on one another for many reasons. This collaborative spirit perpetuates a tone of service and protection regardless of cohort or demographic differences. M1 summed it up best,

saying, “We all work together, so when the opportunity came and I was asked to do it, I didn’t hesitate because I feel that’s just the way it works.” While this sounded generous enough on the surface, the underlying message was one of perpetuating the position and doing anything possible to support fellow superintendents. M2 mentioned the concept of security and how there was no hesitation to mentor when the call from KASA came because of the difficulties experienced in the first year on the job. M2 said, “Having somebody you can contact and that you can trust, that you can ask questions of or just vent if you’re having a difficult situation was one of the best parts of the mentoring program.”

Burdens on the first-time superintendent

In my interview with M1, longevity arose as a concern. M1 stated that, “With all the experience leaving our state, it’s going to be very difficult to fill [the superintendent position].” If based on the number of new superintendents in recent years, or other data, I never found the source. I substantiated high turnover rates in the literature review; I did not find literature on the migration of Kentucky superintendents to other states. However, it highlighted the level of apprehension among the mentors about the factors leading to burnout and, ultimately, the increasing rate of turnover in the state. The rest of this section focused on the stressors that could be leading to higher levels of turnover. These stressors come from external influences such as federal and state legislation and board of education relationships as well as internal influences like high-stakes accountability and day-to-day demands of the job.

I conducted this study on the heels of the most contentious legislative session since the implementation of education reform in the early 1990s. As of the November

2015 election, one party held super majorities in both chambers as well as the governor's seat. The perception among educators was that proposed legislation was not public education friendly, and while I did not address the political implications of this contentious legislation, the climate of the profession was apparent in the interviews. As if the demands of the job were not enough, politics added a new dimension. M2 summarized, "Obviously all the rhetoric the past year, with public education and the pension [reform], I think all of that has been an added stressor for everyone." According to M2, this was an obvious shift in the job, saying, "In the past, it was about collaboration and education and working with people. Now it's about deflecting the attacks and trying to educate people and trying to protect your staff members and advocate for your students."

Politics permeated the interviews with mentors. Superintendent-board relationships permeated the discussions as another relevant stressor. In alluding to the number of votes required to pass a motion on a five-person board, a veteran superintendent offered the advice, "You only have to count to three." While this may be true, those I interviewed for this study – both mentors and mentees – all wanted to reach consensus with their boards. A 3-2 vote may pass a motion, but a 5-0 vote sends a message to the employees and community that the board and superintendent agree on the direction of the district.

When discussing longevity, M3 cited having a supportive board as the "main factor" on a short list of reasons for staying in a district. Similarly, M4 noted:

I'm about double the life expectancy of a superintendent. I've got a very supportive school board. I think that is first and foremost. We had some very

difficult issues... (but) I've been able to, you know, implement my vision with very little, you know, resistance.

In a discussion about the situations that could derail the superintendent-board relationship, M1 emphasized the importance of a unified direction for the district, commenting,

I have a very solid and consistent board. Very little turnover. They have the common vision. They stay with that vision. We've had growing pains as—as we've grown, but they understand the role of superintendent. They understand the role that they have as board members, and they allow us to do our jobs. So it's been a pretty positive thing.

On a more practical level, expectations are for a first-time superintendent to perform at a high level immediately upon accepting the position. This may conflict with the reality of training that occurs during that first year. Despite the title, superintendents are still learners and this learning takes time to acquire and implement. In all of my interviews, participants mentioned time away from the district as a burden, albeit a necessary one. M3 lamented, "I felt there was a lot of time outside of the district that—that made it very difficult for a new superintendent." M5 made a similar comment, saying:

One thing I'm really surprised about is how much time that a new superintendent is out of the district for training. Because I find that you're just getting knowledgeable of your district and you're just figuring out what's going on, and you're being pulled out so much.

M2 mentioned the use of technology as a replacement for attending out-of-district meetings but acknowledged that online attendees could manipulate the engagement. Being physically present and cognitively present are different levels of attention. While this is true for in-person sessions as well, there is a modicum of anonymity that comes with online learning.

Suggestions for improved competency and longevity

Mentors revealed that competency and longevity did not result from training alone, but from the relationships that a first-time superintendent forms along the way. I heard a few specific topics, such as finance and human resources, deemed critical to professional success. However, the connections and associations with peer superintendents and other education professionals acted as an umbrella for the myriad of practical needs attached to the job. M1 commented:

[Superintendents] have to have a group of people they can depend on both inside and outside the district. With all the change coming from the state, with all the budgetary issues, with all of the demands that a unique board member may give someone, you have to have people both in your district and on the outside that you can rely on for advice and for guidance and for support, It's about relationships.

In the remainder of this section, I discussed the need for, and process of, skill acquisition in relation to competency and longevity. I also outlined how amendments to the induction program satisfies this need.

Above all else, mentors emphasized the skill of communication as a key component of a superintendent's toolbox. M4 said it clearly, "If you come into this

position and you can't communicate with people, you're in trouble." On the topic of skill training, M2 provided a similar response:

I think first and foremost is communication. We have to be communicating with one another. I mean, you cannot stress the importance of communication enough. We have to communicate—and this is just my opinion, so people may not agree, but I find that in education, we're so busy trying to get the job done that we forget to tell people what we're doing or why we're doing it.

There was consensus among mentors that the activities in communication training were a bit awkward but benefitted the mentees. Mentors viewed having a consistent message and articulating that message to stakeholders both inside and outside of the organization as the trunk of the communication tree, a metaphor used by the KASA training staff.

Four of the five mentors mentioned the idea of communicating a common vision overlapped with strong internal employee relationships. In all of the interviews, the word "team" described the desired culture, indicating the importance of team building in the first year of service. All first-time superintendents inherit an administrative team from a predecessor. Some come from the same district and have the luxury of knowing the personalities but often the superintendent comes from an entirely different district. On the importance of team and longevity, M3 emphasized, "I'm very blessed to have really good administrators that I work with every day, both at the district level and at the school level. I think if from the superintendent's seat, if you don't have quality people that you work with, I definitely think that will have an overall impact on your stay."

The competency mentioned by all five mentors was financial management. Viewed as both a skill and an art, ensuring the financial stability of a school district permeated the feelings of stress among mentors and mentees. School district budgets are complex, leading M2 to question if “even some superintendents” were versed in the nuances funding formulas. M4 validated this point, using the revenue streams as an example. M4 stated:

I didn’t really know how to set a tax rate, because I’d never done it. I wanted to know how myself [sic.] to calculate SEEK so I didn’t always just pull that from KDE. So really, it was the financial end for me [in training].

For M5, it was another tangent to finance that needed more emphasis, saying:

Human resources would be an area that I would beef up [in training] because I’ve helped superintendents with that area, just knowing the interaction between HR and finance and how all that works. It’s, I think, sometimes a little daunting.

Along with communication and finance, the only other area of competency mentioned by mentors was instruction, and it was not a universal concern among the mentors interviewed for this study. Despite increased scrutiny with high-stakes accountability, the stress associated with district comparisons, and instructional leadership being one of the seven superintendent standards, only X of X mentors mentioned leading the instructional program of a school district in my interviews. I discussed this further in Chapter V. What I found with instructional leadership was that district size mattered, with superintendents from smaller districts being more likely to attach importance to curriculum, instruction, and assessment, probably because of their level of involvement. Superintendents in larger districts are more likely to have an

instructional team, thereby allowing the superintendent to focus on other areas (Curry & Wolf, 2017).

In terms of the structure of the onboarding program, the number of days and time away from the district emerged as concerns from mentors. Specifically mentioned were the induction sessions held the same week as the KASA conference in mid-July when first-time superintendents have only been on the job for a couple weeks. However, they also acknowledged the training topics were pertinent and necessary. M1 suggested:

I think amending [induction] to where the first year may be a little more intense with your mentor. Some of the work that you have to do may be better to be spread out over maybe 18 months to two years so that you can work through those things a second time versus trying to just get through them that first time with all the pressure getting that completed.

During the pilot interview to determine question effectiveness, I interviewed a sitting superintendent from a different cohort. He used a humorous analogy when describing the time away from the district issue, likening the training days to vaccinations. He noted that the thought of the vaccination is never pleasant but when he looks in retrospect, he was thankful for having gone through the experience. The training, in his opinion, protected him against the pitfalls associated with the position.

First-time Superintendent Perspectives

I charted basic demographic information – gender, district type, and district location – for the 10 superintendent participants in Chapter III. However, to understand better the backgrounds of the participants, I asked them additional questions concerning their experiences in education. Years of experience in education ranged from 14 years to

27 years, with the average years of experience being 21.4 years. With all participants, this experience included time in the classroom, mostly at the middle school and high school level. This was no surprise given the ratio of male to female participants. I uncovered a variety of disparate paths after time in the classroom, including positions as building administrators, central office administrators, counselors, and state department consultants. In total, 9 out of 10 superintendent participants worked as a building principal, most for a significant number of years. Interestingly, only 6 out of 10 worked in a central office setting prior to becoming a superintendent. A common thread among all participants included completing a superintendent licensure program at a state university, with the University of Kentucky, University of Louisville, Eastern Kentucky, Northern Kentucky University, and Western Kentucky University mentioned. The majority of these licensure programs are traditional models with defined coursework occurring on the campus. One participant completed the licensure program at a satellite campus and one did the bulk of the coursework on an online platform, which helped navigate the reality of balancing a job and family, a topic of discussion in seven of the ten interviews. P2 explained:

This was 11, 12 years ago, give or take—it was really before the advent of all the online stuff, so it was kind of cutting edge. I liked it because my family was still fairly young and I was able to just log in. I distinctly remember logging in and finishing an assignment after [a family member] had surgery at 11:00 in the hospital room. And that's just something that a traditional classroom setting, at that point, was not going to work for me.

Four distinct themes surfaced from the first-time superintendent interviews (Table 6): First, as I detailed in the literature review, the motivation for becoming a superintendent is generally altruistic and focused on improving the lives of students and families. There are obvious personal benefits; both in financial gain and prestige, but those items did not come forward as priorities. Next, I found those interviewed to be incredibly reflective and introspective, regularly performing various methods of self-evaluation in an attempt to satisfy the aforementioned motivation. In that section, I explored the “why” of choosing education as a profession. The third theme was the concept of people being more important than programs. There was a clear appreciation for the role mentors and the cohort played in the maturation of a first-time superintendent. Finally, I found a theme of background and/or experiences determining feelings of competence.

Table 6. First-time superintendents' perception of the position

Theme	Code	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10
Motivation	Making a difference	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Challenge of leadership	X		X			X	X	X	X	X
	Knowledge and skills	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X
	Financial security			X			X				
Reflective practitioner	Determined preparedness prior to applying	X	X	X	X	X	X		X		X
	Intentional pathway		X	X		X			X		X
	Standard with most growth in 1 st year	5	7	7	7	3	5	3	5	5	7
	Standard with the least growth in 1 st year		2	2		7	2	7	2	2	5
Mentor and cohort	Positive relationship with assigned mentor	X	X	X				X	X	X	X

	Sense of connection with the cohort	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
Prior experiences	Building-level	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
	District-level	X	X	X	X		X			X

Notes: “X” represents an affirmative response to the code. Superintendent standards: 1. Strategic leadership, 2. Instructional Leadership, 3. Cultural Leadership, 4. Human Resource Leadership, 5. Managerial Leadership, 6. Collaborative Leadership, 7. Influential Leadership.

Motivation

Sharp et al. (2002) hypothesized that aspiring superintendents are altruistic in their motivation given their stated reasons for pursuing the superintendency. Most often, it was because they wanted to make a difference. The participants in my study offered similar responses. Illustrating this theme was P9, who commented:

It’s children. You know, working with people. That’s what my edge is. I’m not incredibly political unless things start to jeopardize what I believe in most, and that’s helping kids, families, succeed, so anytime I get to sit down and talk with folks and interact with folks about what we’re able to do for kids, that’s—that’s the most exciting part.

Both P4 and P8 mentioned community relationships and an obligation to do their very best as a mechanism to perpetuate the family feel of their respective districts. P1 offered a view of graduation as a rewarding culmination of the superintendent position. P1 stated:

You get to pass out diplomas and you see those kids that you thought, man, they’re never going to make it. They’re never going to get their diploma. And through blood, sweat, and tears sometimes they got to the finish line and you get to see them get their diploma.

This was especially true for students living in poverty, as mentioned by P5 and P8. P8 explained:

Making a difference with kids is the most rewarding factor in education. When you have a hands-on impact and make good things happen for kids and to create a future for them that can easily tainted or dark, especially those in poverty. It's pretty special when you're able to be a part of that and make a lasting impact on students.

Within the theme of motivation, the first-time superintendents revealed a desire to help oneself in addition to the other stakeholders. For leaders to achieve maximum capacity there must be a sense of regular, professional growth (Curry & Wolf, 2017). I summarize the first-time superintendents' perspectives on the value of experiences to one's career path later in this section, revealing that the desire for knowledge and skill is a trait embedded in the superintendent participants, with education being the conduit for which this occurs. P8 stated:

It's been very rewarding to have—to have worked across a breadth of different kids, different parents, and different communities and been able to—I've been able to learn from them as much as they've been able to learn from me.

This stretching of traditional ideas of learning also extended to previous generations of educators who helped the profession evolve, making today's leaders a byproduct of their efforts. P8 continued:

Going back to the [Kentucky] Educational Reform Act in '89-90, there were a lot of brave people at the very beginning of that who took some risks and—and stepped out of the box and really looked for how to improve outcomes for kids.

These are folks who said we can do better than what we've always done and are willing to step out of the box to make it happen and operationalize it.

Finally, the first-time superintendents revealed a motivation of financial gain.

Interestingly, a few of the participants began to speak on the topic only to retreat to another direction. Only two were willing to talk about it, albeit sheepishly, and despite the fact research gives credence to salary being a motivator. Sutton et al. (2008) found that almost 50% of participants in their study cited the financial package as a motivator to pursue the superintendent position. P6 provided evidence of increased earnings as a motivator, stating:

You know, being transparent and honest, since this is anonymous, certainly the financial piece doesn't hurt. You know, that's a—I'm getting along in my career and, uh, you know, to be able to retire at this rate is—is attractive.

P3 expressed a similar motivation for pursuing the superintendency:

And quite honestly, I can't excuse the fact that if you go and get your education, and you look at how you can provide for your family, so there's also the selfish part that, you know, I've gone and I've paid for expensive education, and I want to get the best return on that investment. Making more money.

Salary matters. Grissom and Andersen (2012) found that salary is a key component for superintendent tenure. Not only do superintendents leverage the salary offered by other districts for their benefit, school boards also use the fluidity of contracted salary to lure potential candidates. This is especially prevalent for districts experiencing high rates of turnover.

Reflective practitioner

As an important piece of the interview process, I wanted to know why the participants decided to pursue the superintendency. I wanted them to use metacognitive strategies to place themselves back in that time period. Because of this line of questioning, I found a group who were extremely thoughtful and reflective on their individual career paths. From fear to uncertainty to needing the challenge, the participants arrived at the doorstep of the superintendency in a variety of ways. Regardless of the path or mindset, most realized ahead of time that life would be drastically different once they assumed the seat of superintendent. P4 captured the uncertainty aptly, remembering:

I want what's best for the students and the community. And everybody's harder on themselves, so I had a lot of talks with myself. Am I ready? Am I going to be, um, good for the students and staff and the community over here? So I think there's always a little bit of self-doubt, but then, you know, I thought nobody could have more passion for the community. Nobody could love the students and staff and community more. But I also know it takes more than passion and love to pull off a job, too.

P5 took a more confident approach, knowing that challenge awaited. P5 described the mindset as “believing that I had the work ethic and the mental ability to be able to learn and grow on the job if I was actually put in that position.” Similarly, P3 hoped to call upon professional experiences to ease any apprehension. P3 explained:

To be quite honest, when I began looking for district office positions, I intentionally looked for positions that would not pigeonhole me in a bigger

district. I looked for opportunities in smaller districts where I knew that I would be exposed to a larger part of the district operation, with the intent of learning as much as I can in order to better be ready for a superintendent position once that opportunity presented itself.

To determine the effectiveness of the superintendent induction program on the competencies, I asked participants how they felt about their skill sets immediately before beginning as a superintendent. P1 reflected on his competency in the days prior to beginning the job, saying:

I thought I knew what I was doing. I quickly found out that I didn't know as much as I thought. I thought I had a pretty good background—a pretty good handle, but I quickly realized that—that sitting on one side of the desk in this chair is a lot different than sitting on the other side of the desk in the chair and giving feedback to the superintendent. It's different. I felt that I was prepared but I wasn't. Let's just say that.

Fears of preparedness most often occurred in the finance realm, or the managerial standard. In relation to growth in management, P8 recalled, "I'd have to say the managerial aspect there of just understanding all of the title funds, you know—all of the things with title monies and contingencies and with budgeting, you know, your tentative budget, working budget, all of those things. Just really understanding the financial aspect of running the district." Continuing the idea of growth out of necessity, P9 commented, "There's so many (financial) laws and regulations that are at the superintendent level that you don't really think about at the school level, so that program and the connections and the support you have from (KASA staff members) was tremendous."

For nine of ten participants, the experiences in education prior to the superintendency provided a layer of security that I discuss later in this chapter. Seven of ten participants reflected on the mystery of accepting a job they had viewed closely but had never had the opportunity to do.

Mentor and cohort importance

The first-time superintendent participants from the induction program revealed the vital role that mentors and the cohorts in forming and engaging in relationships that provide support over the course of the first year on the job. As mentioned in Chapter I, all new superintendents have a team of mentors, including the school board chair, an experienced, acting superintendent, and an executive coach who also served as a superintendent. The selection of mentor superintendents is according to geographic location as well as mentor-mentee strengths and areas of need. Mentors chosen were volunteers who had demonstrated success in the position for more than two years at a minimum. These relationships provide the first-time superintendent access to valuable networks and tangential working relationships more than specific skill attainment (Alsbury & Hackmann, 2006). In addition, the participants provided evidence of an informal fraternity of experienced superintendents who also serve as a resource to those in need. This dynamic was mentioned by P1, who noted his inheriting a number of troubling situations upon accepting the position. Calling the network of superintendents “the number one benefit” of the induction program, P1 recounted

So to say that I, uh, needed support and needed help was an understatement, but I can see some light at the end of the tunnel. I’ve made some good contacts along the way, and I reach out to superintendents all around me, and we’ve found a

pretty good working relationship. I can reach out to them and get two or three answers within a day's time.

Being able to pick up the phone or send an email to a fellow superintendent or a person on the support staff was a recurring theme during the interviews. Participants mentioned the necessity of accessibility due to the immediacy of issues that can arise within the operations of a school district, especially given the risk of costly litigation associated with personnel issues and situations involving special needs students. The participants revealed that their cohort of superintendents becomes a team of sorts, standing at the ready when common problems affect one or more members. P2 reminisced:

I actually made some really pretty good friends out of the onboarding process, because it's, uh—you know, going through anything with a first year person, you find out who's sharing your miseries, who's sharing your successes, and you become pretty tight with them. So there's still people I talk to on the—almost a semi-regular basis that either was my mentor or went through the process with me that is just sounding boards.

Another participant described the power of the network of superintendents in the cohort with the analogy of the kid who walks in the lunchroom never having to worry about a place to sit because you have so many friends. As P10 explained:

The benefits were the fact that you instantly met, you know, what 22 people or however many, you know, were in each class of other newbies that are in the same boat as you. Uh, some of the friends that I made through that group I've remained friends with. I'll sit with them when we go to KASA or KSBA and, you

know, we always will – if something comes up I know I can call them and we share ideas.

On the ability to surround oneself and collaboratively work through issues, P5 noted:

The induction process, through its structure, creates a network of fellow superintendents. I'm sure any superintendent will agree that when you have a group of superintendents sitting together, when we all share that same role and responsibility, you know, it's a—it's very powerful to be able to get their insights and their thoughts.

Aside from busy schedules and finding time to collaborate, I found that participants valued the cohort model. The structure allowed for shared experiences that contributed to deep relationships and connections. While in the field in my professional role, I switched to researcher and observed how cohorts, including my participants, moved in defined groups at summits, conferences, and trainings. The cohort model creates a pack of superintendents that are very much a clique or faction within the superintendent network.

The Value of Prior Experiences

Though not specifically asked in relation to competency or longevity, all of the participants considered their experiences prior to the superintendency as integral in their maturation as educators. Because my study focused on perceptions of the superintendent induction program, and somewhat tangentially, the licensure programs, my questioning did not intentionally target the effects of superintendent-subordinate positions on the competencies. For example, P6 spoke fondly about time spent as an assistant superintendent, saying, “Probably the two years that were the most beneficial in the process were the two years I spent as assistant superintendent, because I felt like the

superintendent went above and beyond [to help me].” P2 lived a similar experience to P6, working many years as an assistant superintendent. P6 explained:

I think doing the job for about eight years really made me a better superintendent because I saw so many different aspects. I’d been dealing with budgets, I’d been dealing with title—with federal funding stuff. I’d been dealing with all the instructional stuff, the assessment, the textbooks, special education, a little bit with the technology, a little bit with transportation—so I think the length of time I spent as an assistant superintendent was really good groundwork for when I became the superintendent of a similar sized district.

As I revealed in the introduction to this section, 6 of the 10 participants worked in a central office setting prior to assuming the superintendency. Participants with these experiences were more likely to espouse the merits of on-the-job training than their counterparts who jumped from the school setting into the superintendency. Directly addressing this dynamic, P9 emphasized:

I’ve told people, unless you work at a district level for a number of years, there is nothing below the district level that prepares you to be a superintendent other than you just know how to deal with people, and you learn how to deal with people. The year I worked at KDE [Kentucky Department of Education] probably gave me as much experience in being able to be a coach without being an authoritarian type.

With only one participant not having principal experience and, therefore, being an outlier, I wanted to highlight this individual’s unique experiences. I found that there was a modicum of self-doubt that the other candidates did not show outwardly. I dug into the

topic with this participant. When questioned, this superintendent said, “What I did know is that I had a lot of support from outsiders. Ultimately, was I ready? I think yes and no.” Moreover, even though this participant worked in a central office setting, there were gaps. They continued:

Even though I saw what [the superintendent] did every day and I saw the job, I still didn’t know everything, and I knew that [the superintendent] shielded me from some things, too, just because that’s kind of what you do for your employees.

This portion of the interview concluded with a promising realization. The participant confidently explained, “I’ve had to call and seek advice, and that realizing that that’s not a sign of weakness goes a long way in helping you do the job. You’re not on an island by yourself, and it’s okay not to know everything.” Despite the doubt, a scan of performance evaluations indicated full confidence from the participant’s school board.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of my qualitative study was to examine Kentucky’s superintendent induction program, examining the participants’ perceptions of the program in terms of increasing their competency and likelihood of longevity (tenure) in the district leadership role. The informants have completed the most recent iteration of the Next Generation Leadership Series—those superintendents who were in Cohort 5 during the 2016-2017 school year. The program is facilitated by the Kentucky Association of School Administrators and follows a manual designed by acting superintendents.

Superintendents in Cohort 5 completed a post-program survey that consisted of questions concerning the onboarding program and questions concerning perceptions of

their own effectiveness. The results of that survey were overwhelmingly positive, which should indicate the realization of stated program objectives. However, program objectives were not my focus. I sought qualitative data to accompany the survey results. I secured these data through interviews with mentor superintendents and Cohort 5 superintendents as a means of triangulating data revealed in post-program survey data.

Mentors believed that the induction process was a positive for their mentees and for the profession as a whole, with the mentor piece being the hallmark of the program. They attribute their own growth as a new superintendent, and the growth of those they have mentored, to the relationships formed as the competencies were addressed, both intentionally through training and by navigating situations as they arose. M3 offered the suggestion that mentoring may even be expanded to pre-service administrators, saying, “Before folks get into applying for jobs, [before] looking to move into a superintendency, I think they should spend time with successful, experienced superintendents to have real conversation about the job.” Also commenting on the induction process as a whole, M5 revealed:

I think [superintendent induction program] gave you some knowledge and some skills to deal with different situations, but until you sit in the office, and you have to make decisions that have that responsibility, you rely on a lot of things, not just what you learned in sessions through the superintendent mentoring. (Onboarding) gives some connection to other superintendents, so you could pick the phone up and give them a call—some collegiality. That’s been helpful, and I’ve maintained those friendships and continued to rely on their knowledge and expertise and advice through the years.

First-time superintendents provided reflections that paralleled those of the mentors, with relationships playing a prominent role in positive perceptions of the program and of self. Many of the participants gave their mentors high praise but almost all saved the highest praise for other superintendents in their cohort. In a profession with as much stress as the superintendency carries, first-time superintendents carry a sense of reverence for mentors and colleagues that sometimes peeked out during the interviews.

P5, discussing the impact of a mentor's words, revealed:

As the years went on, I saw the impact that an administrator, especially a superintendent, can make in a district and for kids. I kind of took it to heart, and I continued to keep that as a driving force for myself, learning and growing every single year, in every position I've held, applying it to this position.

The participants in my study were a reflective lot. They were mostly intentional in their career paths and openly appreciative of the opportunities they have been given and earned over the course of their careers. In sum, they had altruistic motives for pursuing the superintendent position, regularly speaking about relationships with students. Career goals were not a topic of the interview protocol but, more often than not, the goal of positively impacting student lives crept into the conversation. Perhaps P1 summed it up best, saying:

I think we can make some positive changes for the district and do things a little differently and make it a better situation for our community and for our—for our kids. On days that I'm struggling with the monotony that sometimes comes with being superintendent, I think back, well, you've done good things. You've made

some good decisions. You've impacted some kids in the right way...and that allows me to get up and put my shoes on.

Chapter V presents a discussion of my findings and the significance of the research as it relates to the potential development of policy and the structuring of superintendent preparation programs. Recommendations for future research are also included.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of my qualitative study was to examine Kentucky's superintendent induction program, examining the participants' perceptions of the program in terms of increasing their competency and likelihood of longevity (tenure) in the district leadership role. Specifically, does participation in the induction program contribute to positive perceptions of leadership acumen as well as a belief that the skills gained will lead to a tenure longer than research indicates is in the normal range, trumping all other factors associated with turnover. In addition, I solicited suggestions for improvement through qualitative methods.

For this study, I used an action research design. Aimed at finding solutions to real world problems in a timely fashion, action research is a term first coined by MIT professor Kurt Lewin in 1944. As stated previously, the tenure of superintendents is often very short in spite of altruistic motivations and career-long commitment to attaining the position. In the world of education, action research is often associated with short-term classroom studies where teams of teachers identify problems and work toward solutions, continually revising plans as dynamics change. This form of research connects to the larger issues of democracy and social justice, thereby challenging the belief that research must be objective and impersonal (Brydon-Miller, Greenwood, & Maguire, 2003). Over the past 30 years, action research has become a viable research design that has the flexibility to draw upon quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods doctoral

studies, with transferability of findings to similar entities (Herr & Anderson, 2005). It was my hope, that by examining a previous cohort of first-time superintendents, the findings could inform future superintendents in Kentucky, KASA as the governing body for superintendent induction in Kentucky, and similar programs in other states looking to bolster their efforts in superintendent retention.

I used two primary sources of information. The bulk of the information gathered in the study was comprised of formal interviews with participants from Cohort 5. In addition, superintendent induction documents were scrutinized for comparison of intended purpose and eventual outcomes. I also conducted interviews with five veteran superintendents who have served as mentors in the induction program centered on the Next Generation Standards. Interviews with this group of superintendents provided a comparison of perceptions of competency at the conclusion of the first year of service. These perspectives added a layer of depth to the study and informed those responsible for the design of the induction program. In addition, I interviewed the Center for Education Leadership Executive Director/Deputy Executive Director of the Kentucky Association of School Administrators (KASA) to gain perspective on the objectives of the induction program.

I theorized that superintendent informants perceived inadequate support and preparation as contributing to superintendent turnover and that they perceive articulated support programs as beneficial in terms of extending the tenure of superintendents. The following research questions guided my study:

1. What are the perceptions of competency among first-time superintendents after completion of the onboarding program?

2. In what ways could the onboarding program better prepare superintendents given the realities of on-the-job professional responsibility and objectives of the programming?
3. What are the perceptions of longevity among first-time superintendents after completion of the onboarding program?

I applied Sagor's four phases of action research, and embedded the process of conducting qualitative research in Shiva's circle of constructivist inquiry. Using this model, I entered with sensitivity to the subject, looking for no certain truths and formed explanations and theories as I worked through the data with inductive analysis and coding.

My study is significant for four reasons: First, the findings may influence change on KASA's delivery of the Next Generation Leadership Series induction program. Second, graduate-level superintendent preparation programs may benefit from the information. Third, the findings may shape legislation concerning school reform to meet the needs of future superintendents, potentially affecting student achievement. Fourth and finally, prospective superintendents and new superintendents may use the information to better equip themselves for the challenges facing the position, and extend their tenures in the role. Also included in the discussion are limitations of the study and recommendations for further research on training programs as it relates to competency and longevity.

Competency

The first research question sought to determine superintendents' perceptions of competency after completion of the yearlong induction program that occurred

simultaneously with their first year of service. In my study, this meant a comparison of personal reflection against the backdrop of the Kentucky superintendent performance standards. KASA takes on the daunting task of providing training to a couple dozen new superintendents each year. These are men and women at the top of their profession who bring multiple perspectives from many disparate experiences and career paths. Given egos, it would be foolish for KASA to believe their training would please all participants all the time, even though they try. Dr. Caldwell mentioned that one of her challenges is “continuously raising questions through the continuous improvement lens is in terms of faculty and understanding the adult learners needs.” The participants in my study all found value in the superintendent induction program, albeit at varying levels, from “it was necessary, but time consuming” to induction being “the superintendent’s lifeboat.” Perspectives on the overall program and on the specific components were as distinct and dissimilar as the superintendents themselves were. However, through data analysis and reflection, I categorized the perceptions of competency into two fields. The first field is the perceptions of induction that arose from prior experiences (i.e. positions held, responsibilities, years in the profession), and the second field is the perceptions of induction that arose from the situations inherited as new superintendents (i.e. financial strife, contentious personnel issues, political movements). I found mixed responses on all performance standards, and only one competency/performance standard, instructional leadership, emerged as an outlier to the experiences or situations categories. None of the participants in my study indicated this as an area of growth or one that needed more attention; moreover, they all felt like instructional leadership needed minimal programming coverage. I found this odd given the pressures associated with high-stakes

accountability. Further exploration revealed that either participants performed instructional leadership duties prior to becoming a superintendent or they delegated those duties after becoming a superintendent. I could envision a contradictory situation where a first-time superintendent lands in a small district with no extra instructional help after working in a non-instructional role in a larger district. However, this dynamic did not occur in my sample.

More than any other competency, superintendents mentioned financial acumen as the area of significant growth over the first year. Other than superintendents, most district stakeholder never get the opportunity to engage with a district budget, much less the inter-workings of revenue streams such as setting a tax rate. As a whole, they appreciated the in-class learning and grew from the presentations given by sitting, successful superintendents.

In another situation, one of the participants, who felt accomplished in managerial leadership, inherited a situation where the district was operating with a contingency fund under 2%, which is less than the required amount for Kentucky school districts. Transportation needs went unmet, and this was a district with challenging geography and significant student travel required each day. Out of necessity to save the district, this superintendent experienced a wealth of growth in the managerial standard, with financial stability the district's outcome by the end of the school year.

Influential leadership was the other performance standard most often mentioned, specifically growth in political awareness and engagement. This was no surprise given the political tension in Kentucky since the election of a new governor. As I mentioned previously, in November of 2015, the citizens of Kentucky elected a Republican majority

in each chamber along with a Republican governor. Participants in Cohort 5 were welcomed to the position by an already-determined state budget that reflected the wishes of the party and that many viewed as unfriendly to public education. The influential leadership standard was an excellent example of situational growth for Cohort 5, as the need for political engagement was present at the local and state level for new superintendents.

Concerning competency, first-time superintendents definitely perceive personal growth after completing the induction program. This growth varies with each superintendent and is dependent on their lived experiences prior to accepting the superintendent job and the situations they inherit upon accepting the position. The most valued areas of training seemed to be the areas that were least familiar to non-superintendent positions—namely, finance and politics. Educators, specifically those who worked as principals, felt very competent in visionary leadership, instructional leadership, cultural leadership, and collaborative leadership. Almost all of the participants articulated the value of the training in relation to practical experience received in their positions.

Increasing Competency

My second research question sought to elicit suggestions on how to boost competency in first-time superintendents. This question was not a platform for abject criticism of the program, but an opportunity for an informed critique of the curriculum and structures in an effort to serve future cohorts more effectively. Induction, according to Dr. Caldwell, is “a multi-faceted program that is designed to provide 24/7 support to new superintendents or first year superintendents.” Learners are diverse, so

differentiating for two dozen adults is a difficult proposition. I sought suggestions that acknowledged the diversity of individual need and provided practical solutions for learners of all types.

Acknowledged by Dr. Caldwell during our discussion, the feedback most often given is that induction training causes too much time away from the home district. Given the breadth of the curriculum, reducing the time spent as a cohort just minimizes access to experts in the field and time with colleagues. Yes, online learning platforms, virtual interaction (e.g., Skype or Google Hangouts) can replace traditional classroom-based coursework as recommended by a couple participants, but using those modes of communication often means meeting attendees who are minimally present even when you see their faces on screen. While there would still be time away from the district, first-time superintendents may view this as more productive and meaningful with timely, pertinent information. I hypothesize that a parallel training schedule would increase the competencies of the participants.

Contradictory to the notion of too much time spent out of district, a half of the respondents felt that a viable solution to the human resource/personnel/disposition thread was spending more time with their own cohort. The participants used the term “roundtable” on numerous occasions as a request to the program designers. P1, extolling the security of “knowing that they’re not going to judge you” probably said it best. P1 commented:

I actually wish they would have given us more time just to—just to talk about issues and have more of a round table type discussion. This is my issue; this is what’s going on; this is what I’m thinking, and being able to share, because I

think you learn from other. And this is going to sound horrible—but I think you can—there’s something to be learned from other people’s misery, from other people’s issues.

Participants praised the time with experts and understood that there was little extra time to sit and talk with colleagues, yet that is what they wanted. They needed to hear that another person was experiencing the same thing at the same time as opposed to a retrospective lesson.

Longevity

The third research question sought to determine if first-time superintendents perceived outcomes from the induction program having an influence on their longevity in the position. Succinctly, will successful completion of the induction program ensure longer tenures than the research indicates being in the normal range? It is important to remember that induction training is just one of dozens of variables that determine the length of tenure for a superintendent, so it was important to point out the many reasons for turnover in the literature review. Of all those reasons, the one most often cited by exiting superintendents is school board relations (Grissom & Andersen, 2012). During an informal conversation with a sitting superintendent, I heard an account of a school board working in secrecy and refusing to be transparent with a superintendent they had recently hired. While these stories are not common, the accompanying quote solidified the point about variables. The superintendent said, “The best leadership training in the world wouldn’t have been enough for this guy to weather that storm. He needed to get out of there as soon as possible.”

I would have been remiss to ignore the personal factors that lead to career decisions. Moreover, with all of the aforementioned political upheaval, I wondered how the participants felt about the future given their years of experience and any other personal factors. I asked, “Where do you see yourself in five years?” The results from that question are found in Table 7. The top row represents completed years of service at the time of the interview and the bottom row represents the participants’ perceived employment status. W means the superintendent perceived to be working and R means the superintendent perceived to be retired. O means the superintendent was uncertain or had plans other than retirement or being a superintendent.

Table 7. Perceptions of longevity

Completed years of service	22	28	23	23	19	24	15	18	26	26
Perceived employment status	R	R	W	W	W	O	W	W	W	O

Notes: R=Retired; W=Working; O=Other Plans or Unsure

Kentucky educators are eligible to retire after 27 years of service, meaning any participant with 22 years or more in the chart *could* potentially retire. Still, the majority of those in my sample perceived to be working or were unsure. One of the participants who indicated “working” but was eligible to retire said it was due to contract structure and the nuances of the pension system. Dr. Caldwell validated this notion of personal factors determining turnover. She stated, “Superintendents are very, um, in terms of a career ladder, they’re very savvy in deciding when they want to be a superintendent, and so in some cases you see that coming in the last four to eight years of their career.”

In answering the research question, it would be impossible to attribute successful completion of the induction program to longer tenures for superintendents based on my

instrument. Factors beyond the scope of induction often influence turnover. For example, superintendents have no control, or minimal control, over the outcomes of school board elections. The school board that hires the superintendent is often different from the school board that terminates or declines to offer a new contract to the superintendent. However, this does not mean induction has no influence. Effective induction training could equate to advanced competencies, which, in turn, could lead to longer tenures.

Implications and Recommendations

My study extended earlier research on superintendent turnover and induction programs. The documented causes of turnover are many, with school board relations most often appearing, but also joined by district financial struggles, political shifting, and personal burnout. I chose to study what factors may help *retain* superintendents using qualitative methodology. Specifically, I used in-depth interviews to understand how superintendents perceive their competencies after completing an induction program and if positive perceptions of competency will contribute to longer tenures.

Implications for policy

For change to happen at the local level, change must begin at the state level. As detailed in Table 6, the primary areas of growth for members of Cohort 5 were in influential leadership and managerial leadership, particularly the finance component of the latter. Licensure programs at the state universities have been intentional on addressing the intricacies of school district finance, in some cases dedicating an entire course to the topic. Current Kentucky Administrative Regulations indicate that licensure programs shall include district management in the curriculum as well as an emphasis on

the local, state, and federal laws concerning finance. I recommend that all pre-service candidates have exposure to an entire course on district finance, including field experiences, especially given the increasingly tight budgets passed by the general assembly in the 2016-2018 and 2018-2020 biennium sessions.

Similarly, I recommend KASA address a structural change in the delivery of finance. While there is a noticeable focus on the topic, I recommend better alignment with the rhythms of the school year calendar and the real-time processes experienced by the first-time superintendent. Dividing the topic of finance into manageable pieces throughout the induction process would be a welcomed change by the participants according the results of my interviews with Cohort 5.

Superintendent competencies, as discussed previously, are sometimes at the mercy of legislation and a district's ability to implement policy. It is important to understand the political avenues that exist for a superintendent; a condition discussed by many of the participants. Not only do superintendents answer to a local school board, they also have to maintain relationships with a diverse group in the local community, including city and county administrators, state senators and representatives, and those working in the judicial system.

A worthwhile performance task could be to assign first-time superintendents to hold formal conversations with influential leaders in their communities. This could mean local city and county council members, higher education administrators, business leaders, or state government officials. Gathering this information and then returning to a roundtable setting with the cohort would allow for a comparison of lessons learned. I imagine a discussion between a new superintendent and a state senator that details how

the system works best. The senator could detail important issues and how best to advocate.

Political acumen was a profound area of growth for Cohort 5, which mimicked my own experience. Future cohorts, according to my interviews, would welcome advice on how to access leaders, and the optimal timing of that access. For most, the superintendency is the first foray into the political world. P2 explained this dynamic, saying, “As an assistant superintendent that did not live in the district, there wasn’t a whole lot of opportunity that was mandated upon me to be a public figure, and really, the superintendent was more involved in the political aspect than I was. I was more in the trenches.” While political advocacy may not come naturally for many superintendents, advocating for kids, does. Using that lens, formal meetings with influential people would be a welcomed and meaningful exercise.

Implications for practice

Time away from the district interrupts the work of a first-time superintendent. Calling on my own experience, the inconvenience of being away pales in comparison to the unsettling thoughts of what *could* happen in the absence of the district leader. In looking for solutions that neither reduced the days of induction nor used technology to replace human interaction, P2 offered a unique alternative. Succinctly, P2 recommended that the sequence of training shift to better parallel the natural rhythms of a school year. The best example of this recommendation is the setting of tax rates. A new superintendent typically begins the job on July 1, and soon after there is a weeklong training. With new hires and acclimating to board members and the greater community, school begins very quickly. Tax rates are set by September, but the finance training may

not occur until later in the year. This same dynamic could be true for other components such as budgeting and personnel decisions.

Another valid suggestion manifesting from discussions of competency centers on a hybrid of the human resource standard and the cultural standard. More specifically, superintendents have to be able to deal with a variety of personalities. I am unable to attribute this quote to the rightful owner, but during my own induction program, I heard an executive coach say, “You get hired for your skill, but you get fired for your disposition.” I think of that concept regularly. A person could spend an entire career working toward a superintendent position – earning advanced degrees, time away from family, moving across the state – and lose that livelihood by not communicating effectively or not being approachable. Working with difficult people is a feature of most leadership positions. Whether parents of students, community members, or even employees, superintendents face situations that require expertise in managing people. Personnel appeared multiple times in the interviews, especially with those participants who led smaller districts and were more intimately involved in the hiring processes.

A final recommendation stemming from the second research question involved the influential leadership standard, or politics. For a new superintendent, gaining proficiency in this standard is difficult even in the absence of political dissention. However, Cohort 5 knew nothing other than undesirable political forces throughout their first year of service. As I documented earlier, this cohort inherited a political tone unseen in Kentucky and, as a result, had to navigate the political landscape in their local communities, and at the state level, with minimal training or background information. Given superintendents’ altruistic reasons for entering the position (Sharp et al., 2002),

and the nature of the profession, political shrewdness is primarily left to on-the-job training. Although I engaged with the participants individually, the various discussions led to a collaborative solution to this conundrum.

Implications for future research

The time restrictions for this study would not allow for a five-year review of my participants' perceptions of longevity. I recommend future research that revisits my study, or others, and determines if initial perceptions of longevity mirror career paths, and furthermore, what factors led to the materialization of that perception or thwarted the perception. Also in the realm of superintendent retention, I recommend further study in the effectiveness of preparation programs. Explicitly, do superintendents find more value added from licensure programs or induction programs? Do they overlap or complement each other? One participant in my study considered the two "not drastically different" in that they both provided information in an effort to build capacity. Where they differed was in exposure to experts in the field, with induction. An extension of this study, or perhaps a stand-alone study, would be to examine the skill deficits of aspiring superintendents and how the application of differentiated or individualized preparation programs influence perceptions of competency and longevity.

Finally, as a tangent to my study, I recommend taking a deeper look at the variable demographics of superintendents. My participants were 10 unique individuals with 10 diverse paths to superintendency. As I compiled the findings, I wondered if there were certain jobs or a certain number of years that better defined a successful superintendent. Are elementary teachers better candidates than middle school teachers? Does central office experience influence success more than building level experience?

Are superintendents ages 50+ more successful than those in their 30s and 40s? Success is subjective and would be defined by the researcher but the findings could inform a number of stakeholders, including licensure program administrators and local school boards. As an extension of this recommendation, I also recommend looking at first-time superintendents under 35 years of age and their perceptions of competency and longevity. How does this compare to those who become superintendents later in their careers? Furthermore, what training or strategies will help retain them in the position? As of 2018, Kentucky turned over about 15% of superintendents each year over a seven-year period and that trend looked to continue.

Conclusion

The position of the school superintendent in the United States has evolved over the past 200 years in response to the needs of the profession, ever-changing communities, and political mandates (Kowalski et al., 2011). The role of superintendent has shifted in focus from teacher-scholar to manager to democratic leader to social scientist and, finally, to communicator (Callahan, 1966; Bjork, Browne-Ferrigno, & Kowalski, 2018). A number of factors, including school board size, district demographics, financial position, state and local politics, and high-stakes accountability performance can play a role in the challenges facing school superintendents (Byrd, Drews, & Johnson, 2006).

With research indicating that whole-district student achievement is dependent upon superintendent stability (Talbert & Beach, 2013), the need to retain effective superintendents is apparent, especially in historically lower achieving districts. Studies reveal the average tenure of superintendents ranges from less than three years up to more than six years (Grissom & Anderson, 2012; Natkin et al., 2002). If stability is a desired

outcome, how can districts ensure longer tenures for their superintendents? What strategies exist to increase the average number of years for district leadership? Can training play a role in equipping leaders with the necessary tools for battling the known causes of turnover, thereby thwarting the pressures and influences that lead to superintendent transition?

The findings suggest that participation in a cohort-model induction program enhances competencies. In addition, curriculum is valued when led by experts in the field. Real time feedback from staff members and colleagues boosts the experience and causes participants to appreciate the programming. I recommended further research on the many variables that combine to create an effective, successful superintendent, from personal demographic information to career path options. These recommendations will require researchers to perform longitudinal studies up to 10 years to understand thoroughly the impact of induction, or other trainings, on competency and longevity. The results of my study add to the research on superintendent retention, induction programs, and mentoring, which emerged as a pivotal theme from both first-time superintendents and veteran superintendents.

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APPENDIX A: SUPERINTENDENT PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

Standard 1: Strategic Leadership

Summary – Superintendents create conditions that result in strategically reimagining the districts’ vision, mission, and goals to ensure that every student graduates from high school ready for college and careers, prepared for a productive life in the 21st century. Effective superintendents create a community of inquiry that challenges itself to continually repurpose by building on the district’s core values and beliefs about the preferred future, and then developing a vision.

Practices – Superintendents demonstrate effective strategic leadership practices when they:

- a. Create a working relationship with the local board of education, clearly defining roles and mutual expectations that result in a shared vision for the district which assists the schools in preparing students to enter the changing world of the 21st century.
- b. Model and reinforce the culture and vision of the district by having open discussion sessions with teachers, school executives, staff, board members, and other stakeholders regarding the strategic direction of the district and encouraging their feedback on how to better attain the district’s vision, mission and goals; facilitate conversation with all constituencies regarding the importance of dispositions in teaching, learning and leading.
- c. Create processes to ensure the district’s identity (vision, mission, values, beliefs and goals) actually drives decisions and reflects the culture of the district.
- d. Facilitate the collaborative development and implementation of a district strategic plan or district improvement plan, aligned to the mission and goals set by the Kentucky Board of Education and local priorities, using multiple sources of data.
- e. Determine financial priorities in concert with the local board of education based on the District Comprehensive Improvement Plan.
- f. Facilitate the implementation of federal, state, and local education policies.
- g. Facilitate the establishment of high, academic goals for all, ensure effective monitoring protocols, and model the expectation that instructional leaders respond frequently and strategically to progress data.

Standard 2: Instructional Leadership

Summary – The core business of school superintendents must always be teaching and learning in a system committed to shared values and beliefs, and challenging, equitable educational programs and learning experiences for all students. The moral imperative of school district leadership is to create and sustain schools where all students learn, where performance gaps are systematically eliminated over time, and where the primary goal of the adults in the system is to ensure that every student graduates from high school college-and-career ready, prepared for a productive life in the 21st century.

Practices – Superintendents demonstrate effective instructional leadership practices when they:

- a. Lead the District’s philosophy of education-setting specific achievement targets for schools and students of all ability levels and monitor progress toward those targets; demonstrate a belief in the value, ability and worthiness of staff, students and community members.
- b. Model and apply learning for staff and students.
- c. Communicate high expectations for student achievement by establishing and sustaining a system that operates as a collaborative learning organization through structures that support improved instruction and student learning on all levels.
- d. Facilitate the establishment of high, academic goals for all, ensure effective monitoring protocols, and model the expectation that instructional leaders respond frequently and strategically to progress data.
- e. Demonstrate awareness of all aspects of instructional programs.
- f. Are a driving force behind major initiatives that help students acquire 21st century skills including the application of instructional technology?

Standard 3: Cultural Leadership

Summary – Superintendents understand and act on the important role a system’s culture has in the exemplary performance of all schools. They understand the people in the district and community, how they came to their current state, and how to connect with their traditions in order to move them forward to support the district’s efforts to achieve individual and collective goals. While supporting and valuing the history, traditions, and norms of the district and community, a superintendent must be able to “re-culture” the district, if needed, to align with the district’s goals of improving student and adult learning and to infuse the work of the adults and students with passion, meaning, and purpose.

Practices – Superintendents practice effective cultural leadership when they:

- a. Communicate strong ideals and beliefs about teaching and learning with all stakeholders and operate from those beliefs.

- b. Build community understanding of what is necessary for all students to graduate college and career ready and to be successful in the globally competitive 21st century.
- c. Create a unified school system (not a system of individual schools) with shared vision and equitable practices; exhibit dispositions regarding the larger purposes of the educational endeavor.
- d. Build trust and promote a sense of well-being between all stakeholders; display dispositions about the primacy of building and sustaining positive, long-term relationships with all constituents.
- e. Routinely celebrate and acknowledge district successes as well as areas needing growth.
- f. Support and engage in the positive cultural traditions of the community.
- g. Create opportunities for staff involvement in the community and community involvement in the schools.
- h. Create an environment that values and promotes diversity.

Standard 4: Human Resource Leadership

Summary – Superintendents ensure the district is a professional learning community with processes and systems in place that result in recruitment, induction, support, evaluation, development, and retention of a high-performing, diverse staff. Superintendents use distributed leadership to support learning and teaching, plan professional development, and engage in district leadership succession planning.

Practices – Superintendents practice effective human resource leadership when they:

- a. Ensure that necessary resources, including time and personnel, are allocated to achieve the district's goals for achievement and instruction.
- b. Create and monitor processes for educators to assume leadership and decision-making roles.
- c. Ensure processes for hiring, inducting and mentoring new teachers, new school executives, and other staff that result in the recruitment and retention of highly qualified and diverse personnel; develop appropriate succession plans for key district roles, and place staff in strategically effective positions; develop and implement a hiring policy that intentionally includes effective dispositions of all personnel as the core selection element.
- d. Use data to create and maintain a positive work environment.
- e. Provide for results-oriented professional growth and development that is aligned with identified 21st century curricular, instructional, and assessment needs, is connected to district improvement goals, and is differentiated based on staff needs.

f. Ensure that all staff is evaluated in a fair and equitable manner and that the results of evaluations are used to improve performance; hold high standards for performance and take necessary personnel actions to ensure effective school operations.

Standard 5: Managerial Leadership

Summary – Superintendents ensure that the district has processes and systems in place for budgeting, staffing, problem solving, communicating expectations, and scheduling that organize the work of the district and give priority to student learning and safety. The superintendent must solicit resources (both operating and capital), monitor their use, and assure the inclusion of all stakeholders in decisions about resources so as to meet the 21st century needs of the district.

Practices – Superintendents practice effective managerial leadership when they:

- a. Prepare and oversee a budget that aligns resources with district visions and needs.
- b. Identify and plan for facility and technology needs.
- c. Continually assess programs and resource allocation.
- d. Develop and enforce clear expectations for efficient operation of the district including the efficient use of technology.
- e. Build consensus and resolve conflicts effectively.
- f. Assure an effective system of districtwide communication.
- g. Continually assess the system in place that ensures the safety of students and staff.
- h. Work with local and state agencies to develop and implement emergency plans.

Standard 6: External Development Leadership (renamed Collaborative Leadership in 2014)

Summary – A superintendent, in concert with the local board of education, design structures and processes that result in broad community engagement with support for and ownership of the district's vision. Acknowledging that strong schools build strong communities, superintendents proactively create, with school and district staff, opportunities for parents, community members, government leaders, and business representatives to participate with their investments of resources, assistance, and good will.

Practices – Superintendents practice effective external development leadership when they:

- a. Develop collaborative partnerships with the greater community to support the 21st century learning priorities of the school district and its schools; develop and grow realistic and positive dispositions about themselves and facilitate growth in others.
- b. Ensure systems that engage the local board and all community stakeholders in a shared responsibility for achieving district goals for students and school success.
- c. Implement proactive partnerships with community colleges, universities, professional organizations, educational cooperatives, and/or other key professional development organizations to provide effective professional learning opportunities.
- d. Implement proactive partnerships that remove barriers thus ensuring all students have access to college and career courses in high school.

Standard 7: Micropolitical Leadership (renamed Influential Leadership in 2014)

Summary – Superintendents promote the success of learning and teaching by understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, ethical, and cultural context. From this knowledge, superintendents work with the board of education to define mutual expectations, policies, and goals to ensure the academic success for all students.

Practices – Superintendents practice effective influential leadership when they:

- a. Understand the political systems involving the district.
- b. Define, understand, and communicate the impact on proposed legislation.
- c. Apply laws, policies and procedures fairly, wisely, and considerately.
- d. Utilize legal systems to protect the rights of students and staff and to improve learning opportunities.
- e. Access local, state and national political systems to provide input on critical educational issues.

APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT CORRESPONDENCE

Hello _____,

Although I know many of you from our work as superintendents, please allow me to introduce myself. My name is Robb Smith and I am a doctoral candidate at The University of Louisville working under the supervision of William Ingle, Ph.D. I am contacting you today as I begin collecting data for a study concerning Kentucky public school superintendents and believe you would be able to provide critical insight.

The purpose of my qualitative study is to explore Kentucky's superintendent induction program, examining the participants' perceptions of the program in terms of increasing their competency and likelihood of longevity (tenure) in the district leadership role. This is not a program review of the onboarding process, but an in-depth analysis of your reflections and self-perceptions after completion of the experience. I am hopeful that the findings from my study can inform future cohorts of superintendents.

I am asking that you participate in a 45 minute interview. My schedule to conduct an interview is flexible and can be scheduled at a time, date, and location of your convenience. If you have additional questions, please contact me via e-mail at rlsmit30@louisville.edu or call (502) 216-9043.

Thank you in advance. I look forward to speaking with you.

Sincerely,

Robb Smith
Doctoral Candidate
University of Louisville

APPENDIX C: FIRST-TIME SUPERINTENDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. State your name and school district.
2. Tell me about your career in education.
3. What has been the most rewarding aspect of your career? Why?
4. Who are your edu-heroes? What do they mean to you?
5. Why did you decide to pursue the superintendent position?
6. Describe the graduate program that led to your superintendent certification.
7. After achieving certification, but prior to the induction program, what was your perception of your own competencies in relation to the superintendent standards?
8. How did the induction program change your perception of competency?
9. Within which standard(s) did you experience the most growth during your first year on the job? The least growth? Why? To what do you attribute this growth, or lack of growth?
10. What is one area that you wish would have been covered more thoroughly in the induction program?
11. What specific training tools, materials, and programs could be developed that would allow new superintendents to increase their competencies in the standards?
12. Where do you see yourself in 5 years? 10 years?
13. Is there anything I did not ask that you hoped I would?
14. Do you have anything else to share?

APPENDIX D: MENTOR SUPERINTENDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. State your name and school district.
2. Tell me about your career in education.
3. Why did you decide to pursue the superintendent position?
4. What factors have contributed to your longevity?
5. How did the induction program affect your competencies?
6. What made you decide to be a mentor?
7. What do you see as the greatest influence on first-time superintendents?
8. How might you amend the induction program?
9. Do you have anything else to share?

APPENDIX E: CENTER FOR EDUCATION LEADERSHIP EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. State your name and position.
2. Tell me about your career in education.
3. What led you to a position with KASA?
4. What role do you play in the induction program?
5. What do you view as the successes and shortcomings of the induction program over the last 5 years?
6. How have you seen superintendents evolve professionally during your tenure?
7. Why do you think the average tenure of a superintendent is 3-6 years?
8. Do you have anything else to share?

APPENDIX F: INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Project Title:

KENTUCKY SUPERINTENDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF COMPETENCY AND LONGEVITY

Investigator(s) name & address:

Dr. Kyle Ingle
College of Education and Human Development
University of Louisville
1905 South 1st Street
Louisville, KY 40292
william.ingle@louisville.edu

Robb Smith
University of Louisville
14838 Cool Springs Blvd.
Union, KY 41091
rlsmit30@louisville.edu

Site(s) where study is to be conducted: Multiple school districts in Kentucky

Phone number for subjects to call for questions: Robb Smith (502) 216-9043

Introduction and Background Information

You are invited to participate in a research study. The study is being conducted by Robb Smith working under the supervision of William Ingle, Ph.D. The study is sponsored by the University of Louisville, Department of Education Leadership, Evaluation, and Organizational Development. The study will take place at school districts in Kentucky. Approximately 16 subjects will be invited to participate.

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine Kentucky's superintendent induction program, examining the participants' perceptions of the program in terms of increasing their competency and likelihood of longevity (tenure) in the district leadership role.

Procedures

In this study, you will be asked to provide demographic information and information about your past experiences in the first-time superintendent induction program. Your participation will include a 45-minute interview to collect demographic and some contextual information. The interview will be audio recorded. I am highly flexible and am willing to meet with you at your convenience. You may decline to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable.

Potential Risks

There are no foreseeable risks other than possible discomfort in answering personal questions.

Benefits

There are multiple potential benefits of this study: (1) the findings may influence change on KASA's delivery of the Next Generation Leadership Series induction program; (2) graduate-level superintendent preparation programs may benefit from the information; (3) legislation concerning school reform may be altered to better meet the needs of future superintendents, thereby impacting student achievement; and (4) prospective superintendents and new superintendents may use the information to better equip themselves for the challenges facing the position.

Compensation

You will not be compensated for your time, inconvenience, or expenses while you participate in this study.

Confidentiality

Total privacy cannot be guaranteed. Your privacy will be protected to the extent permitted by law. Neither your name, nor the name of your school district, will be used. Demographic information will be used which could possibly identify a district but purposeful sampling includes districts with similar demographics. If the results from this study are published, your name will not be made public. Once your information leaves our institution, we cannot promise that others will keep it quiet. While unlikely, the following may look at the study records:

The University of Louisville Institutional Review Board, and the Human Subjects Protection Program Office. People who are responsible for research and HIPAA oversight at the institutions where the study is conducted. Government agencies, such as: Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP)

Security

All data will be stored on a password-protected computer and will be retained according to UL policy after the study is complete.

Voluntary Participation

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to be in this study, you may stop taking part at any time. If you decide not to be in this study or if you stop taking part at any time, you will not lose any benefits for which you may qualify.

You will be told about any changes that may affect your decision to continue in the study.

Contact Persons, Research Subject's Rights, Questions, Concerns, and Complaints

If you have any concerns or complaints about the study or the study staff, you have three options.

You may contact the principal investigator at (502) 852-6097 or william.ingle@louisville.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a study subject, questions, concerns or complaints, you may call the Human Subjects Protection Program Office (HSPPO) (502) 852-5188. You may discuss any questions about your rights as a subject, in secret, with a member of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) or the HSPPO staff. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, staff of the institutions, as well as lay members of the community not connected with these institutions. The IRB has reviewed this study.

If you want to speak to a person outside the University, you may call 1-877-852-1167. You will be given the chance to talk about any questions, concerns or complaints in secret. This is a 24-hour hot line answered by people who do not work at the University of Louisville.

Acknowledgment and Signatures

This informed consent document is not a contract. This document tells you what will happen during the study if you choose to take part. Your signature indicates that this study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in the study. You are not giving up any legal rights to which you are entitled by signing this informed consent document. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records.

Subject Name (Please Print)

Signature of Subject

Date Signed

<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
Name of Investigator	Signature of Investigator	Date Signed

List of Investigators

Phone Numbers

William Kyle Ingle, Ph.D.
Robb Smith

(502) 852-6097
(502) 216-9043

CURRICULUM VITAE

Robert Lynn (Robb) Smith
14838 Cool Springs Blvd.
Union, KY 41091
robbsmith0125@gmail.com
(502) 261-9043

Education:

2019	Ph.D.	University of Louisville Educational Leadership and Organizational Development
2011	Cert	University of Louisville Superintendent certification
2003	Rank 1	Indiana University Southeast Education administration/supervision Principal certification
1999	M.Ed.	Northern Kentucky University Middle grades education
1995	B.A.	Northern Kentucky University Middle grades math and social studies

Professional experience:

2017 – 2018	University of Louisville adjunct instructor EDTP 201 EDTP 215
2014 – Present	Bellevue Independent (Campbell County, Kentucky) Superintendent
2012 – 2014	Bullitt County Public Schools (Bullitt County, Kentucky) Director of Secondary Education Supervised 6 middle, 3 high, 1 alternative schools

2002 – 2012	North Oldham Middle School (Oldham County, Kentucky)
	Principal 2005 – 2012
	Associate principal 2005
	Student Services Specialist 2004
	Dean/Athletic Director/Facilities 2003 – 2004
	Math teacher 2002 – 2003
2000 – 2002	Oldham County High School (Oldham County, Kentucky)
	Math teacher 2000 – 2002
1996 – 2000	Woodland Middle School (Kenton County, Kentucky)
	School-within-a-school lead teacher 1999 – 2000
	Math teacher 1996 – 1998
1995 – 1996	Twenhofel Middle School (Kenton County, Kentucky)
	Math teacher 1995 – 1996
Professional activities:	
2018 – 2019	UK Next Generation Academy <i>Deeper learning/Competency-based education</i>
2016 – 2019	Northern Kentucky Cooperative for Educational Services – Executive Committee <i>President elect 2016 – 2017</i> <i>President 2017 – 2018</i> <i>Past President 2018 – 2019</i>
2016 – 2019	Kentucky Department of Education/Commissioner <i>Superintendent Advisory Council</i>
2014 – 2019	Superintendent Roundtable
2014 – 2016	NKCES English Language Learner regional committee
2014 – 2015	Next Generation Leadership new superintendent onboarding program – Cohort 3
2013 – 2014	College and Career Readiness Partnership with University of Louisville and Ohio Valley Education Cooperative <i>K-12 OVEC representative for all member districts</i>
2012 – 2014	Instructional Support Leadership Network <i>Bullitt County district representative</i>
2008 – 2014	Schools to Watch review team member

2011	AdvancED/University of Kentucky College of Education – Innovation Summit
2010 – 2011	Authentic Education Workshops (with Grant Wiggins) <i>Understanding by Design</i> <i>Learning Walk</i>
2010	Center for Cognitive Coaching – Foundation Seminar
2010	Instructional Support Leadership Network <i>Oldham County middle grades representative</i>
2010	AdvancED/SACS review team member
2008	Georgetown College – Center for Advanced Study of Assessment Workshop (with Tom Guskey)
2007, 2016	Public Education and Business Coalition – <i>Thinking Strategies Institute</i>
2007	Solution Tree <i>Professional Learning Communities Institute</i>
2005 – 2006	KASA New Administrator Institute
1998	KAESP Aspiring Principal Workshop
Conference presentations:	
2018	KASC Annual Conference, Lexington, Kentucky <i>Fulcrum School</i>
2018	KSBA Annual Conference, Louisville, Kentucky <i>Pension Reform</i>
2017	KASC Annual Conference, Louisville, Kentucky <i>The Bellevue Classroom instructional model</i>
2016	KASA Summer Institute, Louisville, Kentucky <i>NKCES/Early childhood education</i>
2011	AMLE/NMSA Fall Conference, Louisville, Kentucky <i>Alternatives to traditional grading</i>
2011	Host site for AMLE/NMSA fall conference <i>Student-driven curriculum</i>

2010	Schools to Watch National Conference, Washington, D.C. <i>Standards-based grading</i>
2010	Character Council of Northern Kentucky, Cincinnati, Ohio <i>North Oldham Middle as a School of Character</i>
2009	KASA Summer Institute, Louisville, Kentucky <i>North Oldham Middle as a School to Watch</i>
2009	Schools to Watch National Conference, Washington, D.C. <i>Creating a master schedule</i>
2008	KMSA Fall Conference, Louisville, Kentucky <i>Addressing the social and emotional needs of middle school students</i>
2008	KASS Summer Institute, Lexington, Kentucky <i>Effective middle schools</i>
2008	Model Schools Conference, Orlando, Florida <i>Whole child approach in a middle school</i>
2008	Schools to Watch National Conference, Washington, D.C. <i>Addressing the social and emotional needs of middle school students</i>
2007	KMSA Fall Conference, Lexington, Kentucky <i>Developmental responsiveness</i>
2007	KASA Summer Institute, Louisville, Kentucky <i>North Oldham Middle as a School to Watch</i>
2007	Schools to Watch National Conference, Washington DC <i>Developmental responsiveness</i>
Guest presentations:	
2017	Northern Kentucky University <i>Superintendent growth/evolution</i>
2016	Ft. Thomas Independent Schools dual-credit <i>Diverse school districts</i>
2015	Ft. Thomas Independent Schools dual-credit <i>Diverse school districts</i>

2014	Thomas More College <i>Alternatives to traditional grading</i>
2012	Morgan County Public Schools <i>Alternatives to traditional grading</i>
2011	Thomas More College <i>Standards-based grading</i>
2010	Thomas More College <i>Standards-based grading</i>
2009	University of Louisville <i>The math classroom</i>
Community involvement:	
2017 – Present	Northern Kentucky Baseball league coach <i>Dragons Babe Ruth</i>
2016 – 2017	Northern Kentucky Chamber of Commerce <i>Leadership Northern Kentucky</i>
2013 – 2014	Bullitt County Work-Ready Communities <i>BCPS representative</i>
2013 – 2014	Westwood Homeowners Association <i>President (127 homes)</i>
2006 – 2014	Oldham County youth athletics coach <i>YMCA tee-ball and baseball leagues</i> <i>North Oldham Little League baseball</i> <i>North Oldham Little League softball</i> <i>Vipers USSSA baseball</i>
2005 – 2014	American Cancer Society Relay for Life
Awards:	
2017	Kentucky Colonel from Governor Matt Bevin
2010	Character Council of Cincinnati – School of Character <i>North Oldham Middle School</i>
2010	Kentucky Schools to Watch <i>North Oldham Middle School</i>

2007	Kentucky Schools to Watch <i>North Oldham Middle School</i>
2002	Blue Ribbon School <i>Oldham County High School</i>
2002	Kentucky Colonel from Governor Paul Patton

Professional organizations:

Kentucky Association of School Administrators
American Association of School Administrators
Kentucky Association of School Superintendents
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development