

ABSTRACT

DIXON, JONATHAN SCOTT. North Carolina School Superintendents' Perceptions of Preparedness for the Superintendency. (Under the direction of Dr. Bonnie Fusarelli and Dr. Lance Fusarelli).

Studies of school superintendents have captured the attention of educational researchers and practitioners alike for decades. Often, these studies have focused on the leadership styles of superintendents, their changing roles and responsibilities over time, and the politics inherently linked to being the leader of an entire school system. However, studies of the pre-service academic preparedness of superintendents are also increasingly important as educators and researchers attempt to gain a better understanding of how superintendents are prepared for their position of leadership.

The purpose of this study was to determine North Carolina school superintendents' perceptions of their preparedness for the superintendency. Of particular interest are school superintendents' perceptions regarding pre-service academic preparedness for the superintendency, those domains of knowledge that North Carolina school superintendents feel they most need to know, and how well North Carolina superintendents feel they were prepared for each domain of knowledge during their pre-service academic experience.

Using snowball sampling techniques, North Carolina superintendents were interviewed and their responses transcribed and coded to determine patterns and categories for further qualitative analysis and synopsis. Some superintendents selected and interviewed stated that many of the courses taken in their pre-service academic programs were not useful. Too, it was noted that their responses in regard to the utility of these courses often aligned with their responses regarding their perceptions of the most important domains of knowledge. Finally, the North Carolina superintendents interviewed reported that the

internships and mentoring they received most impacted their perceived preparedness, and that future programs should be modeled to reflect these perceptions.

North Carolina School Superintendents' Perceptions of Preparedness for the Superintendency

by
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DEDICATION

This body of work is dedicated to my girls: To my fife, Kendra, who is ever the light that guides my ship to port; to my eldest daughter, Lusa, the little artist who is a daily reminder of the joys inherent in learning newfound things; and to my baby girl, Izzy, whose mischievous grin and unlimited energy keeps me going. To Jen, thanks for always being my ace.

And, to Dad: I wish I could thank you again for everything you taught me that got me here. It doesn't feel quite right without your pacing proofread...

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Studies of school superintendents have captured the attention of educational researchers and practitioners alike for decades. Often, these studies have focused on the leadership styles of superintendents, their changing roles and responsibilities over time, and the politics inherently linked to being the leader of an entire school system. However, studies of the pre-service academic preparedness of superintendents are also increasingly important as educators and researchers attempt to gain a better understanding of how superintendents are prepared for their position of leadership.

The first notable study of superintendent preparedness was conducted by George Strayer in 1923. Strayer identified the best practices and traits associated with successful superintendents, and these were later incorporated into textbooks for educational administration classes (Glass et al., 2007). Strayer's study began what would become a decennial study of superintendents, conducted primarily by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), nearly every decade until the present. In the second ten-year study, conducted in 1933, the focus shifted to one of fiscal management and instructional leadership; however, the impact of this study on the way superintendents were prepared was unable to be verified by researchers (Tyack & Hansot, 1982). No study was conducted during the 1940s because of the impact of World War II; but, in 1950, the AASA investigation of the role of superintendent resurged, with a descriptive study that sampled many rural and urban superintendents to provide a compelling view of their professional and personal lives.

The fourth decennial study, in 1960, was small in size, but the first to integrate survey data of superintendents along with best practices that were suggested by the authors of the study. This time, there was more of a focus on what one should do as a superintendent, but very little explanation of why the suggestions given were considered best practice. This changed with the fifth, and next, decennial study of the superintendency in 1970, where the new foci were the technicalities of the superintendency, the demographics of superintendents, and the role of superintendents as social scientists leading their communities (Glass et al., 2007). The sixth study in 1982 had a more personal feel—the focus was on superintendents' professional experiences and preparation for the job, their opinions regarding evaluation and other controversial educational topics of the time, and their relationships with local boards of education. A following installment of decennial research in 1992 found superintendents stressed (mostly due to financial woes), embroiled in politics and the conflicting demands of stakeholders, and feeling the full impact of the accountability and reform movement on the superintendency. This was also the case in the 2000 study; but, of primary interest, this decennial research was the first of its kind to devote a specific subsection of the study to superintendent licensure and preparation (Glass et al., 2007). As of the most recent AASA decennial study in 2010, little had changed. However, school boards were receiving more attention from superintendents, nearly one-fourth of educators entering the superintendency were female, and more superintendents were reporting that they were actively reading research regarding best practices in educational administration (Kowalski et al., 2011).

Other researchers have also been interested in the preparation and reporting of research regarding school superintendents in the new millennium. For example, Cooper, Fusarelli, and Carella (2002) found that 97% of superintendents considered themselves

proficient in the area of staff development, 92% reported proficiency in curriculum design, 89% felt confident in new construction and school bonds, 88% understood labor relations; but, surprisingly, only 87% were confident in the realm of technology. But even more striking is the fact that a meager 65% of them felt confident managing race relations. That same year, Cooper, Fusarelli, Jackson, and Poster (2002) opined regarding superintendent licensure and preparation, explaining that “as states are considering either expanding and strengthening superintendents’ preparation at one extreme, or the elimination of state certification requirements altogether at the other, we need to take a critical look at the development, structure, and effects of university-based programs for school superintendents, as well as ways to improve their ‘training’” (pp. 242-243).

Additionally, Cooper and Fusarelli provided recommendations for solving the dilemmas affecting what is arguably a crisis situation—school leaders who are unprepared for the superintendency. They proposed better salaries and benefits, more perks, district support and assistance, and greater recognition by professional organizations nationwide (Cooper & Fusarelli, 2002). Finally, the educational research of Fusarelli and Fusarelli revisited the concept of superintendents as leaders and social scientists in their communities, as highlighted in some of the seminal decennial AASA studies that arguably provided much of the initial interest and groundwork for studying superintendents and their preparation for the superintendency (Bjork & Kowalski, 2005).

This study aims to expand upon this aspect of educational research highlighting superintendent preparedness by summarizing and analyzing North Carolina school superintendents’ perceptions of preparedness, as well as the perceived adequacy of that preparedness. This study of school superintendents in North Carolina is appropriate because

North Carolina receives increasing coverage in the media for its exceptional network of colleges and universities, led by the network of 16 universities that make up the greater University of North Carolina (UNC) system. Therefore, it is only fitting to see how well these North Carolina university programs, as well as those outside our state, are preparing future school leaders according to the perceptions of the superintendents who have graduated from these programs.

Despite the number of esteemed universities that offer Ed.D. and Ph.D. programs for aspiring superintendents, some educational researchers have been increasingly critical of the academic preparedness of superintendents over the past few decades (e.g., Broad Foundation and Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2003; Hess, 2003). These critics highlight the fact that the curricula of university programs designed to prepare superintendents have changed little since inception (despite considerable changes in the roles of the superintendent), and the dynamic shifts in the climate of education for which superintendents are being prepared. These researchers critique pre-service academic programs designed for superintendents because of what they see as an inability to effectively marry the theoretical aspects with the practical aspects of the superintendency. Too, critics of the pre-service academic preparedness of superintendents believe that university programs, as well as the professors that lead those programs, inadequately meet the holistic needs of superintendents and, therefore, inadequately meet the needs of many students and other stakeholders who rely on the expertise and preparedness of the superintendent in his/her role as manager, principal teacher, and community leader.

However, many of the studies that have been conducted regarding superintendent preparedness tell a very different story from that portrayed by the critics. In fact, when these

superintendents were surveyed, these leaders often believed that they received good, if not excellent, preparation for the superintendency (Glass, Björk, & Brunner, 2000; Glass, Louis, & Louis, 2007; Kowalski et al., 2011). This resounding response from superintendents has echoed throughout decades of research and literature that examine this phenomenon. There are certainly areas of knowledge where, in hindsight, superintendents have voiced a need for more preparation; but, overall, superintendents feel as if they received adequate training for the complexities that accompany the superintendency. So, even if the critics are less than positive regarding the pre-service academic preparation of these school leaders, the consumers of this preparation—the superintendents—believe that they are being prepared to do the job that, arguably, they should know best.

Regardless of who is correct, the critics or the superintendents, the continued dialogue and debate warrant further investigation. Certainly, there are things that could be done better insofar as the pre-service academic preparedness of superintendents is concerned; even the superintendents themselves admit as much. However, the resounding response from prior studies and surveys, which indicates that superintendents have been quite satisfied with the academic pre-service training that they have received, gives us healthy pause in this conversation. Therefore, it is appropriate to conduct further research to better understand what is being done well, as well as what still needs work, in regard to the academic preparedness of school superintendents. North Carolina, with its exceptional array of colleges and universities that offer academic programs to train superintendents, as well as a rich history of public education for its citizens, is an appropriate location to study this phenomenon.

Statement of the Problem

To better understand the particulars of the superintendency, specifically as it relates to superintendent preparedness in North Carolina, more research needs to be conducted to understand superintendents' perceptions of their preparedness for the position, as well as the perceived adequacy of that preparedness, especially in regard to the university coursework that likely preceded ascension to the superintendency. Arguably, preparation for the superintendency has become inadequate, considering the changing roles of the superintendent over time and the increasing complexities of the job. To be sure, the quality of the academic preparedness of these school superintendents by collegiate and university programs contributes to these superintendents' perceptions of that preparedness.

However, university master's and doctoral programs that are designed to train superintendents for the future vary in their foci, coursework, and overall philosophy of curriculum design developed to ensure preparedness for the superintendency. Analysis of these programs and their offerings for future superintendents, especially heretofore in North Carolina, has yet to be conducted in detail.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine North Carolina school superintendents' perceptions of their preparedness for the superintendency. Of particular interest are school superintendents' perceptions regarding pre-service academic preparedness for the superintendency as a result of participation in doctoral (Ed.D. or Ph.D.) or master's level coursework embedded within university programs. This study also aims to establish those domains of knowledge that North Carolina school superintendents feel they most need to know and be able to demonstrate in practice in order to be successful in a position as the

leader of an entire school district. Finally, it is the intent of this research to determine how well North Carolina superintendents feel they were prepared for each domain of knowledge during their pre-service academic experience.

Therefore, it follows that the research questions for this study are:

- How do North Carolina school superintendents perceive their overall preparedness for the superintendency, including preparedness by university master's and/or doctoral programs, if they received such education?
- What domains of knowledge do North Carolina superintendents perceive as most and least important to the superintendency?
- How could superintendent preparation be improved, and what would be the best method(s) for preparing future superintendents?

Primarily, this study will focus on researching the preparedness, and adequacy of that preparedness, of North Carolina school superintendents according to their own views and perceptions. A focus on academic preparedness at the university level will also answer questions about where North Carolina superintendents were academically prepared; whether this preparation was adequate (and if not, why not); and which courses and experiences were/are the most and least useful to them as school superintendents in North Carolina.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it analyzes an area of education, specifically the perceptions of preparedness of North Carolina school superintendents, that has not been closely examined. In addition, this study contributes to the knowledge base of educational researchers and practitioners interested in the preparedness of school superintendents, especially those interested in North Carolina. Moreover, this research could improve

practice, as the information gleaned provides North Carolina educators at the university and public-school level with a better understanding of the issues surrounding the preparedness of superintendents for their positions of leadership. Furthermore, this study provides a better understanding of the specific pre-service academic coursework that superintendents found most and least useful during the course of their superintendency. This information provides universities insight into how to better structure the curriculum for educational administration programs in order to meet the needs of superintendents in the future.

This research provides information that can aid universities in developing more effective programs for future North Carolina superintendents, as well as school leaders like them across our nation and beyond, so that these school superintendents can feel better prepared for the monumental task that awaits them. Given the statement by Glass, Björk, and Brunner (2000) that “(t)he restructuring or rebirth of superintendent preparation and in-service training is certainly one of the two or three most serious challenges facing the profession in the 21st century,” it is certainly worthwhile to further examine this phenomenon of superintendent preparation in North Carolina (p. 127).

Overview of Research Approach

This study was conducted using qualitative research methods, with a focus on the utilization of interviews, to answer the proposed research questions. A series of interview questions were asked of North Carolina school superintendents in order to determine their perceptions of preparedness for the superintendency. Using this interview protocol, North Carolina public school superintendents were selected via snowball sampling techniques to determine each new participant for this study of superintendent preparedness.

Data were collected continuously as North Carolina school superintendents participated in the interviews, and the responses of these school leaders were further analyzed by the researcher using qualitative coding and analytics. As these data were summarized and categorized, patterns were revealed regarding the responses of these superintendents. These data were examined through the lens of the aforementioned research questions and utilized in order to further the investigation in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.

Chapter Summary

Study of the pre-service academic preparedness of school superintendents is but one arena of research regarding the superintendency that is of considerable interest to educational researchers and practitioners. The focus of this study is to research superintendent preparedness by interviewing North Carolina school superintendents in order to gather their perceptions of preparedness, as well as their thoughts on the adequacy of their preparedness for the superintendency.

Some educational researchers have voiced poignant concerns regarding the academic preparedness of American superintendents. However, many of the studies that have been conducted regarding superintendent preparedness have indicated that superintendents are pleased with their preparation for the job (Glass et al., 2007; Glass et al., 2000; Kowalski et al., 2011). This back and forth between those researchers heralding the merits of university programs designed for superintendents and critics who highlight the weaknesses of the present system of pre-service academic preparation for the superintendency provides an interesting backdrop for this study.

More research needs to be conducted in order to understand North Carolina superintendents' perceptions of preparedness, as well as their perceived adequacy of that

preparedness. This is especially true when analyzing the university programs attended by acting superintendents in North Carolina. Although university programs that are designed to prepare these school leaders for the future vary considerably, many of them offer the same core courses in order to prepare school administrators for the superintendency.

The purpose of the study was to gain a better understanding of North Carolina superintendents' perceptions of their preparedness for the superintendency. The research questions are:

- How do North Carolina school superintendents perceive their overall preparedness for the superintendency, including preparedness by university master's and/or doctoral programs, if they received such education?
- What domains of knowledge do North Carolina superintendents perceive as most and least important to the superintendency?
- How could superintendent preparation be improved, and what would be the best method(s) for preparing future superintendents?

This study focused on researching the preparedness, and adequacy of preparedness, of North Carolina school superintendents according to their own views. Research conducted to study the perceptions of superintendents in North Carolina was significant because it contributed to a facet of the educational research literature that, as of yet, had not been investigated fully. As North Carolina superintendents participated in the interview designed for this study, in order to gain a better understanding of superintendent preparedness and the adequacy of preparedness, qualitative coding methods were utilized to synthesize and analyze the interview data using qualitative research methods.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 2 reviews the existing body of research that has already been conducted regarding the preparedness of school superintendents. In Chapter 3, the research methods utilized for this study are described in greater detail to allow for replication by other educational researchers interested in the preparedness of school superintendents and other similar educational topics. In Chapter 4, the findings of this study are presented, along with the data collected from the interviews of North Carolina superintendents. The findings of the study are discussed in Chapter 5, along with implications for future research and practice.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Although literature regarding the preparation of school superintendents has long existed, it is only during the last decade of study that the topic has garnered marked attention from educational researchers and educators. This is due, primarily, to increased competition among university programs that prepare superintendents, increasing challenges to the governance of local districts, and the existence of a new level of scrutiny regarding the school superintendency (Cooper & Fusarelli, 2002). As Glass, Björk, and Brunner (2000) explain, “These changes may be viewed as either a crisis, or an opportunity for reconceptualizing the superintendency and restructuring how the next generation of superintendents are identified, prepared, and selected” (p. 127). Therefore, it is appropriate to review the literature related to the academic pre-service preparation of superintendents, as well as the literature related to the adequacy of that preparation, in order to determine how best to further study and address this phenomenon in the future.

Chronology of the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) Decennial Studies

The most longitudinally comprehensive study of the American school superintendency is that which has been conducted, primarily by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), nearly every ten years since 1923. In fact, since this time, the only decade in which the superintendency was not studied by the AASA in a decennial format was the 1940s, due in part to the effects of World War II on the American populace. In each decennial study, new insights into the state of the American superintendency are shared that have contributed to the most historically complete study of this phenomenon to date.

The first study, compiled as a yearbook by George Strayer and entitled *The Status of the Superintendency*, was completed in 1923 with the belief that “one must know facts before he can determine procedure,” and with the hope that the information gained from the study would “result in more efficient administration of the public schools and interests of the children” (Glass et al., 2007, p. 3). It is important to note that during this time in American history, the principles of scientific management began to take root—principles that still are evidenced in the nature and organizational trends of the modern superintendency (Callahan, 1962).

These scientific management principles, made popular by Frederick Taylor, were widely implemented by school administrators, especially those in large cities in the 1920s to 1930s. This was evidenced by the fact that the foci of cost efficacy, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness demonstrated in the American business sector during this time were also communicated to be the necessary foci of the school superintendent as well. And, for the most part, superintendents at the time heeded this advice and led urban and rural school systems with these scientific management principles as the guiding force for years to come (Glass et al., 2007).

Therefore, it is not surprising that Strayer and his cohorts designed the first study to draw on an extensive amount of descriptive data from large urban districts in order to identify the best practices of exemplary superintendents. The results of Strayer’s study had a significant impact on the process of superintendent preparation during this era, mainly because those best practices and traits of superintendents identified in this first decennial study were later published in university textbooks, which were widely used to prepare future school leaders of the time for the rigors of the superintendency (Glass et al., 2007).

The second decennial study was conducted in 1933 and was entitled *Educational Leadership: Progress and Possibilities*. It was an extremely large study of school superintendents in which 3,150 participants were examined—the biggest sample of superintendents studied to date. Some argue that it is likely to be the most comprehensive group of data regarding superintendents to ever be collected, studied, and analyzed (Glass, et al., 2007). The findings of this study had a lasting impact on how superintendents managed fiscally, as instructional leaders, in interactions with staff members, and insofar as the distribution of capital outlays were concerned. However, due to the variation between the many districts studied, and because of the ways that the educational goals of these districts were written at the time, the impact of the study on the pre-service academic curriculum and instruction provided to the school superintendent of this decade is somewhat unknown (Tyack & Hansot, 1982).

Again, due to World War II, no study was conducted in the 1940s; however, the decennial studies continued in 1950 with *The American School Superintendency*. This study, much like the study conducted in 1933, sampled a large group of superintendents in urban and rural school districts and provided rich descriptions regarding the jobs and lives that they led. Because this study was the first to follow World War II, there was much allusion to democracy and the purpose of the school in defending that democracy. Due to the popular belief of the time that the public school was the linchpin of a democratic America, superintendents had no problems securing funding for teaching positions or obtaining the capital outlay allotments needed to build new schools in order to accommodate the post-war baby boom (Glass et al., 2007).

The fourth decennial study was conducted in 1960 and entitled *Professional Administration for America's Schools*. This study was small in comparison to the previous AASA studies, but it was significant because it integrated data from surveys of superintendents with best practices that were suggested by the authors of the study. As Glass, Louis, and Louis (2007) describe, the study reflected the fact that textbooks used in educational administration courses of the day described *how* to perform the day-to-day tasks of the superintendency, without ever describing *why* those tasks should be completed. Again, although this study contained very little new data and drew mostly upon prior research to communicate most of the best practices presented, it is still a significant contribution to the literature on school superintendents because it continued the study of this phenomenon into the fourth decade.

In 1970, a fifth AASA study was conducted that was even smaller than the study from the prior decade; only 741 superintendents were sampled in *The American School Superintendent: A Research Study*. At this formative time in American history, closely following the civil rights movements that defined the 1960s, superintendents were dealing with issues such as minority rights, increased urbanization, rapidly growing populations, and student access to higher education. Also, the credibility and durability of American public schools were being criticized by many in the United States during this time (Glass et al., 2007). Therefore, this fifth study of superintendents focused mainly on “an extensive array of demographics and the ‘technical’ work of the superintendent” (Glass, Louis, & Louis, 2007, p. 3). But the most important aspect of this study was the obvious shift from the superintendent’s role as scientific manager (as had been the case since the 1920s) to the superintendent as a leader of the community and social scientist. This focus was evident in

the recommendation made at the conclusion of the 1970 study that superintendents should work as social scientists, incorporating the needs of the community with the needs of the school (Glass et al., 2007). It is worthy of mention, in light of the other literature written about superintendent preparation, that this focus on the superintendent as social scientist would be echoed by other educational researchers decades after this study was published (Bjork and Kowalski, 2005).

The American Superintendent 1982 was the sixth decennial study of the superintendency to be conducted by AASA. This study was important because it provided an outline for the future decennial studies. This study was the first of its kind to reveal research on the personal characteristics of the superintendent—his/her professional experiences, job context, preparation, school board relations, evaluation, and opinions on key issues related to the superintendency. However, unlike some of the previous studies, there were no recommendations for professional practice based on data from the study, and no lists of traits that superintendents needed to possess to be successful. This is important because it is indicative of a deviation away from viewing superintendent preparation as simply a honing of those personal traits previously thought to be integral for all school superintendents (Glass, et al., 2007).

The next AASA study was conducted in 1992 and was entitled, *The Study of the American School Superintendency: America's Educational Leaders in a Time of Reform*. This study contained research regarding those same elements of the superintendency from the 1982 study (personal characteristics, professional experiences, job context, preparation, school board relations, evaluation, and opinions on key issues); however, this study also

focused on the arenas of school reform and accountability that had become such integral components of education during this era.

The 1992 study focused less on researching the work hours, political beliefs, and family dynamics of school superintendents. However, it did uncover the stress, politics, and conflicting demands faced by superintendents, as well as the impact of increased oversight and accountability on the superintendency. Also, the 1992 study highlighted the continuing financial stressors that surrounded the superintendency, due primarily to increasing state demands for reform (especially regarding accountability) at this time. Finally, this study highlighted the fact that collective bargaining had become a significant source of considerable conflict for superintendents, especially those in the urban North of the United States during the 1980s (Glass et al., 2007).

Much like the 1992 study, the next AASA study named *The Study of the American School Superintendence 2000: A Look at the Superintendent of Education in the New Millennium*, continued to focus on those areas of the superintendency (personal characteristics, professional experiences, job context, preparation, school board relations, evaluation, opinions on key issues, the impact of school reform, and accountability) that were the foci of the prior decennial study on the superintendency. This study is particularly important, however, especially in the context of the proposed study, because it was the first of the decennial studies to focus intently on the preparation of superintendents.

This emphasis on superintendent preparation in the 2000 study was likely a result of the increasing focus at the state level on licensing and standards-based preparation that had led up to the new millennium. However, it is important to note that the standards devised by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) and the Council of Chief State

School Officers in 1988 were of significant importance to the modern movement advocating for increased superintendent preparation. However, even the ISLLC standards bear a striking resemblance to those standards identified by Franklin Bobbitt and Elwood Cubberly in their *The Supervision of City Schools: Some General Principles of Management Applied to the Problems of City-School Systems* (1913) and *Public School Administration* (1916), respectively (Glass et al., 2007). Although its focus was not necessarily novel or groundbreaking, the 2000 decennial study is still worthy of mention, especially in terms of the continued chronology of the AASA decennial studies up to this time.

The most recent decennial study sponsored by AASA was conducted in 2010 by Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, and Ellerson, and followed the same format as the preceding study conducted in 2000. Characteristics of superintendents and their employing districts, professional experiences, elements of practice, superintendent and school board relations, gender and race/ethnicity, professional preparation of superintendents, politics, mandates, standards, and government relations were all topics of research. This decade of study was arguably most defined by the presence of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), and a marked increase in those accountability measures that had been implemented a decade earlier.

Interestingly, most of the findings from the 2010 study deviated very little from those of the 2000 study, with some exceptions. For example, some changes were evident in the way the superintendent interacted with the school board, as superintendents were found to be more likely to have provided orientation for board members and more likely to spend additional time communicating with their school board. Too, more females (24.1%) were found to be working as superintendents than ever before. Additionally, more superintendents

were found to have entered into the administrative ranks as assistant principals rather than as principals. Although the researchers offered no explanation as to why this might be the case, it can be speculated that the assistant principalship is a more prevalent administrative entry-level position today than it was when the phenomenon of superintendent preparation was first studied. Also, more superintendents reported reading research and other professional literature than ever before (Kowalski et al., 2010); this was likely a result of the preparation that they received in formal academic programs, in which frequent engagement with recent educational research was required. This most recent decennial study, along with information gleaned from prior decennial studies, provides a wealth of information for review, especially when examined in light of this research on superintendent preparedness in North Carolina. Additional data pertinent to superintendent preparation from the 2010 decennial study will be described in greater detail as it fits in to the chronology of research from the new millennium that follows.

Chronology of Research on Superintendent Preparedness in the New Millennium

In 2000, Cooper, Fusarelli, and Carella published *Career Crisis in the School Superintendency? The Results of a National Survey*, in which the preparation of school superintendents was further studied. This study employed the Superintendents' Professional Expectations and Advancement Review (SPEAR™) instrument to determine the skills and specialties of superintendents, amongst a wealth of data regarding school superintendents. With this instrument, superintendents had to rate their expertise in a variety of areas such as Building Construction/Bond Issues, Human Relations, Labor Relations, Race Relations, Curriculum Design, Staff Development, Community Relations, Finance/Budgeting, and Technology (Cooper, Fusarelli, & Carella, 2000). The study found distinct patterns in the

skill sets that superintendents reported: Nearly all respondents, out of 1,707, reported that they possessed a level of “High Expertise” or “Moderate Expertise” in the areas of Community Relations (99.7%) and Human Relations (99.5%), meaning that they felt as if they were able to work well with people and their greater communities, including school board members and local community groups. When their areas of expertise were further analyzed by the authors, it was found that 97.4% of superintendents studied felt that they were skillful in the arena of Finance/Budgeting, 96.9% felt that they were skilled in the area of Staff Development, and 92.3% reported proficiency in Curriculum Design; fewer felt their skills were adequate in the area of Labor Relations (87.7%) and Building Construction/School Bond Issues (89.4%). Interestingly, in the specialized area of Technology, only 86.5% felt proficient, indicating a need for expertise, probably due, in part, to the age of the superintendents who responded (whose mean age was 50, with 30 years of experience on average in K-12 education).

However, the most striking of all the results was that the area in which superintendents felt the least prepared and skillful was Race Relations. Only 65%, a stark difference from the other percentages reported in the study, felt that they were skillful enough in this arena; this was especially true for the superintendents who led school districts with a larger proportion of African-American, Hispanic, and immigrant students (Cooper, Fusarelli, & Carella, 2000). This study is an important addition to the literature on superintendent preparation because it made clear the areas of expertise where superintendents felt the most confident and, conversely, those areas where they felt they needed the most preparation. Too, the study reported that some superintendents become “hoppers” based on their area of expertise and move from location to location depending on the need for

someone with expertise in a particular area (i.e., Curriculum Design), an interesting fact that affects the perceptions regarding the mobility of superintendents. Finally, for the purposes of this proposed study, the SPEAR™ instrument is a useful template for how a survey of the preparedness of school superintendents should be designed when conducting educational research.

Bruce Cooper and Lance Fusarelli also teamed with Barbara Jackson and John Poster in 2002 to pen *Is “Superintendent Preparation” an Oxymoron? Analyzing Changes in Programs, Certification, and Control*. They introduce this article by offering that “as states are considering either expanding and strengthening superintendents’ preparation at one extreme, or the elimination of state certification requirements altogether at the other, we need to take a critical look at the development, structure, and effects of university-based programs for school superintendents, as well as ways to improve their ‘training’” (Cooper et al., 2002, pp. 242-243).

It is also pointed out by Cooper et al. that, in some states, required certification for superintendents is becoming less of a prerequisite for the job. These authors also quote Andrews and Grogan, who state that “(f)ew universities have programs tailored specifically for the position [of superintendent] although most Ph.D. and Ed.D. programs in educational administration are considered to be preparation programs for superintendents” (Cooper, et al., 2002, p. 8). It is suggested that this lack of specific attention to the needs of superintendents by universities is indicative of the greater problems that encompass the dilemma of superintendent preparation (Cooper, et al., 2002).

Further, Cooper et al. explain in depth the issues related to state certification, state licensing and accreditation, and the linkages between entry-level and district-level

administrative certification. In regard to state certification, they explain that “(s)lowly but steadily, licensing in education is moving from being a relatively quiet, slow, and decentralized process to a national movement of some force and impact” (Cooper et al., 2002, p. 244). As Cooper et al. opine regarding the state licensing and accreditation of superintendents, they point out that many states set the requirements that govern university programs designed to prepare these school leaders. These requirements typically consist of a particular number of hours of coursework, an internship, and specific coursework regarding the superintendency (Cooper, et al., 2002). They add that, “(n)o advanced ('central office') internship experience is required; no test or review is expected; and standards are imposed on the university granting the courses, not the candidates” (Cooper et al., 2002, p. 246).

Too, it is mentioned that some districts have begun hiring persons to be superintendents with experience in other disciplines such as business, the military, or politics; more often than not, these superintendents are appointed by the mayors of large urban school districts (Cooper, et al., 2002). This phenomenon of non-educators as superintendents has also been the focus of other researchers, as they have detailed this in their own studies. For example, Petersen and Fusarelli (2006) point out that “(w)hen school boards seek out nontraditional superintendents, it is often in an attempt to find a heroic leader who can salvage a failing system” (p. 49). The authors also state that “[...] it appears that it is not the fact that individuals are educational outsiders that makes the difference but rather that they have the interpersonal qualities, political acumen, and leadership skills required to lead a school district and work with a school board” (Petersen & Fusarelli, 2006, p. 49).

Duckworth also notes in his dissertation, titled *Non-Traditional Public School Superintendents: An Exploratory Case Study*, that “(o)ne of the first things that has to be

decided is the kind of change that is needed by the district. Is the change necessitated by financial crises, deteriorating or inadequate physical infrastructure, operational problems, mandated restructuring, academic improvement needs, or a combination of several of these factors? Districts seeking a transformational leader must then decide what type of leader will bring about the best results. The targeted goals and objectives should then be part of the skill set and expertise required of the prospective leader” (2008, p.141).

Cooper, et al. highlight the problem of marrying the theoretical aspects of the superintendency to the practical ones. Additionally, they mention that some students are simply pursuing an administrative degree to get a job as a superintendent, with no real interest or focus on the application of those concepts taught in the Ph.D. or Ed.D. curricula once their superintendency is secured. Too, the rigors of the internship are taken into question by the authors, revealing a potential need for more relevant and rewarding field experiences (Cooper et al., 2000).

The Promises and Perils Facing Today’s School Superintendent, also edited by Bruce Cooper and Lance Fusarelli in 2002, point out the crisis described by Jerome Murphy in 1991: “The U.S. faces a serious shortage of qualified school administrators [at all levels], and not just in urban districts” (p. 509). Cooper and Fusarelli believe that this statement by Murphy lends itself to five major dilemmas for the present and future of the superintendency.

First, the authors state that superintendents are aware of the crisis to which Murphy alludes, but they are also personally satisfied with their careers and happy to be superintendents. As the data from the Cooper and Fusarelli study indicate, these superintendents believe the crux of the crisis to be one of the comparatively low quantity of

applicants, not the quality of applicants (Cooper & Fusarelli, 2002). This insinuates that superintendents believe themselves to be well prepared for the superintendency.

The second dilemma that the authors explain is in regard to the issue of mobility. They point out that this information is verified in the AASA 2000 decennial study conducted by Glass, Björk, and Brunner, where 10% of reporting superintendents had spent their whole career in one school system. Cooper and Fusarelli point out that only 11% of superintendents surveyed in their study had worked in more than one state, “countering the myth of the nomadic superintendent, wandering from place to place throughout the country” (Cooper & Fusarelli, 2002, p. 10).

The third dilemma that is noted by the authors is the need for superintendents in those places considered least desirable to work, due either to urban conditions, poverty, or a combination of these and other factors. In fact, 93% of the superintendents surveyed indicated a preference for districts like the ones in which they were currently employed; they showed marked disinterest in inner city or urban districts and much preferred suburban ones (Cooper & Fusarelli, 2002). Their final point in relation to the need for leaders in those districts considered to be least desirable is that the market for superintendents is somewhat marginalized by districts that only hire from within or are only likely to hire superintendents from districts of comparable size (Cooper & Fusarelli, 2002).

The fourth dilemma that Cooper and Fusarelli address is the low supply of superintendent candidates nationwide. The authors first explain that this low supply is likely due, in part, to the low percentage of women who become superintendents, probably due to the higher average in the number of years they tend to spend in the classroom—8.99 years compared to 6.62 years for their male counterparts (Cooper & Fusarelli, 2002). However, the

number of female superintendents has increased dramatically in the last decade, so this discrepancy in the gender of superintendents may achieve more homeostasis in the near future (Cooper & Fusarelli, 2002).

The fifth and final dilemma that Cooper and Fusarelli see as integral to the issues surrounding the school superintendency are those related to the skill sets of superintendents. As mentioned before, and as the authors point out again, some nomadic superintendents would move to and fro based on the need for their specific skill sets. Regarding the professional preparation of superintendents, they state that “(i)f superintendents are effectively to lead diverse school systems, then it is imperative that they receive more professional development training and develop greater competency in [these] skill area[s]” (Cooper & Fusarelli, 2002, p. 17).

Cooper and Fusarelli conclude with recommendations for solving the five dilemmas that they have identified. According to data from the SPEAR™ questionnaire, they point out that the following six options might help in achieving a solution to the posed dilemmas: tenure for superintendents; higher salaries and better benefits; perks (cars or homes); district assistance; university support; and professional recognition by national organizations. The superintendents surveyed seemed most amenable to higher pay and better benefits, although they also felt that help from the district would be a big draw. Interestingly, tenure for superintendents received the lowest ratings from superintendents as a potential incentive (Cooper & Fusarelli, 2002).

Bonnie Fusarelli and Lance Fusarelli provide insight into the need for superintendent preparation in their chapter, “Reconceptualizing the Superintendency: Superintendents as Applied Social Scientists and Social Activists,” presented in the 2005 book *The*

Contemporary Superintendent: Preparation, Practice, and Development. Their argument is that superintendents must be prepared to be good social scientists—to know the research available about best practices in schools and be able to use that information for continuous improvement. They argue that this involves gaining community support and involvement in the execution of school reforms at the district level and beyond.

They explain that, in addition to the historical changes in the role of the superintendent, that three “currents” have contributed to the thought that a superintendent must be a social scientist and social activist (Bjork & Kowalski, 2005, p. 192). They explain that “(t)he three currents include (1) powerful demographic and societal changes that challenge efforts at school improvement; (2) recent systemic reform initiatives such as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) that emphasize the learning and well-being of all students, so that no children are left behind; and (3) changes in administrator preparation focusing on issues of equity and social justice” (Bjork & Kowalski, 2005, pp. 192-193).

In regard to the demographic and societal changes that present challenges to superintendents, they address the fact that, despite a wide array of reforms, there remain gaps in student achievement that have yet to be addressed (Bjork & Kowalski, 2005). The authors urge that “(w)hat is needed is substantive change in the structure and design of schooling, and educational leaders committed to equity and excellence must lead this effort” (Bjork & Kowalski, 2005, p. 193). Further they state that, “Preparation programs should help would-be superintendents embrace this expanded role and build the civic, social supports necessary to meet the nonacademic needs of students that are often prerequisites to academic achievement—including active involvement in building civic capacity to initiate and

implement comprehensive social policies to reinvigorate local communities” (Bjork & Kowalski, 2005, p. 195).

Fusarelli and Fusarelli also highlight the modern-day emphasis on reform, primarily characterized by the No Child Left Behind Act, which has made accountability the focus of superintendents nationwide. As they succinctly put it, “To flourish in this new era, superintendents will need to create an environment that values evidence-based educational practices and work to better prepare school district employees to participate in research and evaluation and apply research-based school improvement techniques” (Bjork & Kowalski, 2005, p. 196).

Finally, the authors focus on the arena of superintendent preparation, the aspect of their article that most informs this study. In terms of the preparation of superintendents, the authors point out that these school leaders are not prepared for the social justice issues that increasingly define modern-day schools (Bjork & Kowalski, 2005). In regard to the preparation provided to these superintendents by universities, the authors opine that “(c)hanging demographics, especially when coupled with the push for high-stakes standardized tests and the resulting racial and socioeconomic status (SES) achievement gap, necessitate a rethinking of the way universities prepare school leaders” (Bjork & Kowalski, 2005, p. 195). The authors point out, as has been gleaned from other previously referenced literature regarding the preparedness of superintendents, that the field of educational leadership is shifting from simply examining what school leaders do, to studying the greater purpose of leadership in a school system (Bjork & Kowalski, 2005). In fact, in agreement with what Cooper, Fusarelli, and Randall (2004) suggest, the authors note that, at the core, being a good superintendent means being a good social scientist.

Fusarelli and Fusarelli address this concept of the school superintendent as social scientist, as well as the need for administrative programs at the university level that address this increasingly important role of the school leader. Fusarelli and Fusarelli expound upon this idea and write that “preparation programs must train superintendents to see the big picture—as applied social scientists, as social activists, and as social advocates for all children. University-based preparation programs have the resources to expose students to a broader, more holistic view of educational systems than do professional organizations” (Bjork & Kowalski, 2005, p. 200). To further support their suggestion, they quote Goldhammer’s (1977) aged but relevant statement that “designed as a position of educational leadership, [the superintendency] is now more significantly marked as a position of coordination and orchestration rather than one of independent leadership... The opportunities for statesmanship, leadership, and direction, although more complex and exacting, are possibly even greater today than ever before” (p. 164).

The most recent AASA decennial study conducted in 2010 devoted Chapter 8 solely to the study of the professional preparation of school superintendents. This study provided a wealth of data regarding these surveyed superintendents and their perceptions regarding preparation for the superintendency. This chapter of the study devoted to superintendent preparation is divided into two parts, highlighting the pre-service academic preparation and licensing of superintendents, and the continuing education of those superintendents. Of the decennial studies conducted, this one provides the most recent information to inform this study of North Carolina superintendent preparation.

The authors set the stage for their research on superintendent preparation by highlighting the criticisms leveled against university-based academic preparation programs.

The authors point out that researchers such as Hale and Moorman (2003), Hess (2003), and Levine (2005) have written national reports that have severely critiqued the pre-service academic preparation of school administrators and “have contributed to waning public trust and confidence that once was enjoyed by professors delivering traditional academic preparation” even though their “rhetoric frequently outstrips reality” (Kowalski, McCord, Petersen et al., 2010, p. 117). They highlight the fact that some of the critics, specifically the Broad Foundation and the Thomas B. Fordham Institute (2003), have pinpointed superintendent preparation by universities as being an area that is especially ineffective and irrelevant, to the point that they argue that licensing requirements are essentially unnecessary and are holding back potentially competent superintendents from attaining these positions of leadership in schools (Kowalski, McCord, Petersen et al., 2010). The authors also point out that academic programs designed to prepare teachers and administrators are based on the criteria of each state, and that alternative programs for administrator certification are virtually nonexistent due to the fact that most administrators must have a valid teaching license (Kowalski, McCord, Petersen et al., 2010).

Glass, Björk, and Brunner (2000) explain that pre-service academic preparation for most school administrators, especially superintendents, is usually comprised of the same curricula: classes that cover school law, finance, personnel, organizational theory, and community relations. But, Petersen, Fusarelli, and Kowalski point out that there is no one curriculum that has been adopted by universities across the United States to ensure that superintendents will be similarly prepared, and this lack of a consistent curriculum is probably slowing demands for a national superintendent licensure exam (2008). This focus

on the impact of licensing issues in regard to pre-service academic preparation at the university level led the authors to address these issues more in-depth in their study.

In the 2010 decennial study, the issues surrounding pre-service academic preparation and licensing were considered important enough to be addressed in a separate subheading. First, the authors of this AASA study pointed out that academic preparation for superintendents had been addressed in the decennial studies throughout the decades since 1923. They go on to explain that superintendents appear to feel as if they have been appropriately prepared for the superintendency: In the 2010 study, nearly 80% of those superintendents surveys rated their pre-service academic preparation as “good” or “excellent” (Kowalski et al., 2011). The authors also point out that even critics of pre-academic superintendent preparedness such as Levine (2005) reported that about 67% of polled administrators in studies had rated their experience as “valuable,” as opposed to the paltry 56% of respondents who labeled their experiences as “high quality” (Kowalski et al., 2011, p. 118). Even novice superintendents, working for the first time ever in the roles of lead administrators in smaller districts, gave overall high marks to university programs designed to meet the needs of superintendents (Kowalski et al., 2011). Despite this fact, Hess (2003) and several other critics have lobbied lawmakers to change licensing laws so that any interested person could/can apply for the position without a license. As the authors summarize, “licensure is a pivotal policy issue for the education profession generally and for the superintendents specifically” (Kowalski et al., 2011, p. 119).

Next, the authors of this most recent AASA decennial study regarding the pre-academic service of superintendents decided to focus solely on data regarding how many superintendents possessed a doctoral degree. The authors provide the statistic that doctoral

degrees increased 48% in the ten years spanning 1993 to 2003 to support this claim (Kowalski et al., 2011). However, Kowalski and colleagues also point out a disturbing trend—the percentage of superintendents with doctoral degrees in hand has not increased within the last decade, despite continual gains in these numbers for 30 years prior.

Finally, the authors of this 2010 decennial study evaluated the importance of specific coursework in preparing superintendents for the superintendency. They found that the three courses that were considered to be of most use were, beginning with the most important: school law, school finance, and school public relations. The results of the study indicated that school superintendents felt that the three courses that were least important were, beginning with the least important: diversity, research, and tests and measurement (Kowalski, et al., 2011).

Again, this most recent, and most extensive, of studies into the phenomenon of superintendent preparedness provides a wealth of data that will be used for comparison with the results from this study of North Carolina superintendents. Kowalski et al. have established the model for the study of superintendent preparedness for future researchers and future study such as this work. Their insight into the overall perceptions of academic preparation for school administrators, state licensing issues, data regarding the degrees awarded to superintendents, opinions of former professors, and the importance of specific coursework provide a valued template of research for comparison and replication.

In Michelle Young's "Effective Leadership Preparation: We Know What It Looks Like and What It Can Do," Young points out that we know from the research that quality leadership matters, and that preparation and development has an impact on school leaders (2015). In her research, Young also highlights the University Council for Educational

Administration (UCEA) and the role UCEA has had in ensuring quality educational leadership preparation, through recognition efforts like the Exemplary Educational Leadership Preparation (EELP) award. She also points out that UCEA has collaborated with the Learning and Teaching in Educational Leadership (LTEL), the American Educational Research Association (AERA), and the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA), as well as other organizations such as the Wallace Foundation, to create the Joint Research Taskforce on Educational Leadership Preparation, leading to “significant increases in the knowledge base” (Young, 2015, p. 4). As she states, “Their work, along with expert opinion, provided important insight into a set of essential core program attributes, including a well-defined, leadership-for-learning focus; coherence; challenging and reflective content; student-centered instructional practices; competent faculty; positive student relationships; a cohort structure, supportive organizational structures; and substantive and lengthy internships” (Young, 2015, p. 4).

This alliance resulted in research regarding “preparation programs features as well as their effects on graduates’ knowledge, leadership practices, and career outcomes” (Young, 2015, p. 4). Also, evaluation tools were created as a byproduct of this collaboration, such as UCEA’s Initiative for Systemic Program Improvement Through Research in Educational Leadership (INSPIRE Leadership), that “provides a 360° evaluation tool for educational leadership preparation program effectiveness” (Young, 2015, p. 4).

Young points out the critiques of university preparation programs, summarizing the thoughts of those researchers that have spoken out openly and negatively about the preparation of school leaders. She highlights the ways in which university preparation programs have been criticized, including the way that students are selected and recruited, the

quality of education received, assessment methodologies, certification procedures, and placement of graduates in leadership roles (Young, 2015). Young also notes that the United States Department of Education has echoed these concerns, stating that, “In 2005, the USDOE reiterated these critiques and added that conventional programs lack vision, purpose, and coherence” (2015, p. 5). Interestingly, despite the many criticisms of preparation programs, Young illuminates that the number of programs has doubled, especially in the private industry, with “few programs that reflect the features associated with high-quality leadership preparation” (2015, p. 5).

It is also mentioned by Young that, often times, professors serving in preparation programs for school leaders may be interested in adopting strategies and measures suggested by the research but are unable to do so. More often than not, it is suggested, this happens because professors “lack the means by which they can convince their university officials to support the program improvements, particularly if these require more faculty resources (such as to arrange for better internships or to work with local districts for better program articulation)” (Young, 2015, p. 6). Therefore, Young suggests that the research on leadership preparation must be better used, with “a strategic focus on translation, dissemination, and utilization based on a strong understanding of end user needs as well as the contexts in which they practice” (Young, 2015, p. 6).

Again, the focus on UCEA and its collaboration with multiple partners and institutions to improve the preparation of school leaders is emphasized. As Young points out, “Of particular significance is UCEA’s partnership with the Wallace Foundation, which has contributed significantly to the knowledge base on effective educational leadership over the last decade. UCEA has served as a thought and communication partner for the Wallace

Foundation since 2000. Through this relationship, UCEA has made significant resources available to its members and its broader stakeholder community. In addition, in 2013, the Wallace Foundation agreed to underwrite the Annual EELP Award” (Young, 2015, p. 6). Young explains the importance of this award, and its contribution to the betterment of university preparation programs, which would not be possible without the support of the Wallace Foundation.

Young concludes by positing that educational leadership preparation matters. Those school leadership preparation programs that are most effective are markedly characteristic in composition and features. The author points out that these universities are the ones that are having notable “influence on their graduates’ learning and career advancement” (Young, 2015, p. 8). Finally, she alludes to an occurring shift in the field: “We would describe this shift as one that moves programs from delivering content about leadership to engaging future leaders in authentic leadership experiences that are purposefully designed to reflect contemporary challenges and opportunities of leadership practice” (Young, 2015, p. 8).

In a related analysis, Stephen Jacobson, Martha McCarthy, and Diana Pounder collaborated to pen, “What Makes a Leadership Preparation Program Exemplary?” in 2015. These authors had all served on the first review committee that selected recipients of the Exemplary Educational Leadership Preparation (EELP) award, given by the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) in 2013. They provided an explanation of the criteria for the EELP award, and the features of the award-winning preparation programs, in this article published in the *Journal of Research on Leadership Education* (Jacobson, McCarthy, & Pounder, 2015).

As they point out, the first recipients of the EELP award were the University of Texas—San Antonio (USTA) and the University of Illinois—Chicago. Jacobson, McCarthy and Pounder noted that, “(b)oth of these programs met and exceeded the criteria we applied in determining the recipients of the 2013 UCEA EELP Award” (2015, p. 64). For the purposes of this article, however, the authors focused on the specific features of the EELP-winning programs in the areas of: program focus; student recruitment and selection practices; program personnel; district partnerships; curriculum design; teaching and learning processes; clinical experiences; and overall program outcomes and effectiveness (Jacobson, McCarthy, & Pounder, 2015).

Although the University of Texas at San Antonio designed its Urban School Leaders Collaborative (USLC) program to provide a master’s degree and principal licensure for school leaders who desire to be advocates for social justice, the University at Illinois-Chicago (UIC) program was designed to provide an Ed.D. in Urban Leadership, and turnaround urban schools that are in need. The UIC program “focuses on practitioner inquiry as the primary driver of school improvement” (Jacobson, McCarthy, & Pounder, 2015, p. 65). Too, the UIC program is based around there being a commitment by all stakeholders to the unique focus of the program (Jacobson, McCarthy, & Pounder, 2015).

The process for doctoral UIC candidates is self-described as highly selective, and the program admits only 15-20 candidates, most ethnic minorities, each year. Candidates for the University of Illinois-Chicago program must take part in a two-hour interview where they submit a school improvement plan, analyze a video, and provide a portfolio of artifacts and evidences. Around half of those candidates who get to the interview stage are selected. (Jacobson, McCarthy, & Pounder, 2015).

The UIC program is designed to have retired principals participate as mentors for the students. Overall, however, the faculty is comprised of tenured, clinical, and administrative members. In fact, it was noted by Jacobson, McCarthy, and Pounder that “a large number of tenure-track and clinical faculty teach in them, and other district or auxiliary personnel serve as mentors, coaches, data analysts, directors, and related roles to support the programs” (2015, p. 67). Most importantly, it is noted by the authors that “strong university-district partnerships may be a necessary, albeit insufficient, condition for building an exemplary preparation program in school leadership (Jacobson, McCarthy, & Pounder, 2015, p. 68).

At UIC, there is a specific focus on the development and assessment of instruction, leadership, and the cyclic nature of school improvement planning. And, as mentioned prior, there is a focus on the social justice needs of leading in an urban atmosphere. However, the most interesting focus of the UIC program may be the year-long clinical experience that occurs while the students are still taking academic courses, to teach them applied and theoretical skill sets in preparation for school leadership (Jacobson, McCarthy, & Pounder, 2015).

The University of Illinois at Chicago’s focus is on service to urban schools through data-driven decision-making, quality instruction, and a focus on organizational leadership. Too, the UIC program has developed two unique pedagogies that address the academic and clinical needs of students (Jacobson, McCarthy, & Pounder, 2015). The unique academic element involves inquiry projects that are “focused on achieving school improvement by managing analyzing, reflecting upon, and utilizing school data to resolve problems and improve student and school outcomes” (Jacobson, McCarthy, & Pounder, 2015, p. 71). In

short, UIC students are taught to be outcomes-based school leaders (Jacobson, McCarthy, & Pounder, 2015).

Based on the work of Jacobson, McCarthy, and Pounder, it would appear that exemplary school leader preparation programs have characteristics that other school preparation programs would be wise to mimic. It is important that these programs have a specific mission, and that all stakeholders be committed to this mission. Too, it is important that universities are partnering with school districts to provide preparation programs that are rich in academic and clinical experiences. These exemplars have also made a point to recruit and select students that are a good fit for the program models. They have ensured that there is an adequate faculty, of persons from a variety of backgrounds, to provide students with excellent preparation for school leadership positions. In meeting the academic and clinical needs of students, these programs have ensured that the curriculum is aligned to standards and outcomes, and that students are allowed to participate in internships and clinical field experiences. Finally, these programs are collecting and analyzing data to make sure that the future school leaders they have graduated have been well prepared and are serving and growing students in a measurable way (Jacobson, McCarthy, & Pounder, 2015).

Cosner, Tozer, Zavitkovsky, and Whalen (2015) focused specifically on the University of Illinois at Chicago's (UIC) EELP award-winning Doctorate in Urban Education program in their "Cultivating Exemplary School Leadership Preparation at a Research Intensive University". Here, they examined the UIC program's design, key features, routines, processes, and challenges faced, as well as the results of recent program evaluation. The authors posit that this examination "provides granular guidance for those in

the field of school leadership preparation who are interested in engaging in the work of program transformation” (Cosner, Tozer, Zavitkovsky, & Whalen, 2015, p. 12).

In terms of the program design, the UIC Doctorate in Urban Leadership was based on a partnership with the Chicago Public Schools. The UIC admitted one cohort in the fall of each year. An on-site district mentor and UIC leadership coach supported each student in his or her residency. Specific attention was paid to the blend of academic and clinical experiences students would be receiving. Students were required to complete a take-home final exam and participate in research experiences. One of the most interesting elements of design was the expanded definition of clientele to include the students in those high-needs urban schools that would be served by the UIC residents. Finally, data was analyzed in regard to placement rates, as well as student achievement in the schools that UIC residents were serving, to ensure ongoing continuous improvement efforts (Cosner, Tozer, Zavitkovsky, & Whalen, 2015).

Key program features of the UIC Doctorate in Urban Education were adjusted due to some of the feedback that was received from students, and some of the initial data that indicated that not all UIC students were being successful as leaders in urban schools. The number of information sessions made available to recruit future students was expanded, and it was expected that UIC candidates would have a GPA of 3.5 or higher and successfully interview and present evidence of successful teaching. The number of cohort learning experiences was also expanded to ensure that the group of UIC students could learn and better work together as a group. There was a deliberate move away from theory-laden courses to those that provided a blend of practice and theory. Too, there was a focus on partnering UIC students with the best fit in terms of schools and district mentors with whom

to complete their clinical residency. Interestingly, there was also a semester of coursework designed solely to prepare the UIC student for the residency experience. The coursework was designed to best complement the field experiences and coaching support (Cosner, Tozer, Zavitkovsky, & Whalen, 2015). The signature pedagogy of the UIC program was based around “authentic cycles of inquiry,” where these future school leaders were asked to think, act, and reflect regarding their experiences (Cosner, Tozer, Zavitkovsky, & Whalen, 2015, p. 20). However, a dissertation requirement for UIC students was rejected in favor of a capstone project, as a means of learning about research. Adequate staffing was essential to the success of the UIC program, and professors and district-level leaders teamed to train UIC students to be school leaders. This partnership between the University of Illinois—Chicago and the Chicago Public Schools was a key feature of the UIC program. Finally, data regarding job placement and student achievement was continuously collected and analyzed to help determine the success of the program (Cosner, Tozer, Zavitkovsky, & Whalen, 2015).

In terms of routines and processes, a variety of strategies were employed to ensure that the UIC program was successful and that students were being well prepared. First, there was a focus on the processes and routines involving cycles of inquiry. Next, there was an organization of the whole team into “content strand teams” to plan the four to six courses that encompassed a particular content strand. Then, there were “semester course teams” comprised of UIC faculty and district coaches that met to discuss ways to better align courses with coaching. Cosner, Tozer, Zavitkovsky, & Whalen, 2015, p. 29). Coaches and university faculty also met in bimonthly collaborative planning meetings to discuss the protocols and systemization of the coaching process. Finally, the team met at the beginning

of each semester to come up with lesson ideas for the semester and share syllabi. (Cosner, Tozer, Zavitkovsky, & Whalen, 2015).

Despite the success of the UIC program, there have also been significant challenges that had to be addressed. For one, due to the reliance on the partnership with the CPS district, the university had to figure out how to deal with the changes in leadership roles and persons within the CPS district. Too, because of the focus on cycles of inquiry, the UIC faculty met each semester to develop lessons learned from the previous semester, and how it might impact the next. It was also learned that there needed to be a focus on “shared understandings” regarding the work expectations of UIC students. This was because students would often receive conflicting information regarding their work and expectations from university faculty and coaches (Cosner, Tozer, Zavitkovsky, & Whalen, 2015).

Again, Cosner, Tozer, Zavitkovsky, and Whalen conclude that continuous improvement of school leader preparation programs can, and does, happen. The University of Illinois at Chicago is an example of this happening, even in an area where there are many schools with many challenges. The authors posit that the nature and quality of the features inherent in school leader preparation programs is of utmost importance. Too, they point out that the continuous improvement of school leader preparation programs is equally critical, in order to see the same type of success that has been observed within the UIC Doctorate in Urban Education Leadership program. The supports provided when communities, schools, and universities work together are also a hallmark feature of the UIC program. However, it is also worthy of mention that the UIC program could not exist without proper funding. But, when the funding is available to provide enough university faculty, school district coaches,

and staff to support a program such as UIC, the results are impressive (Cosner, Tozer, Zavitkovsky, & Whalen, 2015).

Summary of the Literature Review

As evidenced by the literature on superintendent preparation, as well as recent changes in the way that North Carolina school boards evaluate school superintendents, the method and preparation of school district leaders is still in flux. It was only in 2007 that the North Carolina State Board of Education approved revised superintendent standards, encompassing seven separate, distinct, and arguably broad domains. At present, superintendents in North Carolina are evaluated based on these standards in the areas of Strategic Leadership, Instructional Leadership, Cultural Leadership, Human Resource Leadership, Managerial Leadership, External Development Leadership, and Micropolitical Leadership. (Retrieved April 19, 2012 from <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/profdev/standards/school-executives-standards/superintendents.pdf>).

As stated on the NCDPI website, “(f)ollowing adoption of the new standards, the Department of Public Instruction contracted with McREL to develop and validate the North Carolina Superintendent Evaluation Process” (Retrieved April 19, 2012 from <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/stateboard/meetings/2010/09/tcp/09tcp06.pdf>). This process requires a North Carolina superintendent to self-evaluate themselves on a Likert-scale of four categories (ranging from Developing, Proficient, and Accomplished, to Distinguished), and meet with the school board to discuss the results, after which time a “consolidated performance assessment” occurs. Following this assessment, the school board rates the superintendent and a final meeting is held to discuss the evaluation and set goals for

the superintendent (Retrieved April 19, 2012 from
<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/profdev/training/superintendent/evaluation-booklet.pdf>).

Too, other organizations across the United States have made it their goal to revise the ways in which superintendents are prepared to lead our nation's school districts. The Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) is one such venture, in which the CPED consortium, in collaboration with research studies conducted by the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, is attempting to improve the program design of the Ed.D. through experimentation, membership expansion, and research to understand the impact of CPED on Ed.D. programs via mixed-methods case studies at 21 educational institutions in the United States (Retrieved on April 19, 2012 from <http://cpedinitiative.org/>).

The Broad Superintendent's Academy is also invested in making a change in the way that superintendents are prepared, especially for urban superintendents in the United States. As it states on the organization's website,

The Broad Superintendents Academy was started in 2001 by entrepreneur and philanthropist Eli Broad to transform urban school districts into effective public enterprises. The Academy is a program of The Broad Center for the Management of School Systems. The Academy identifies and prepares prominent leaders—executives who have experience successfully leading large organizations and a passion for public service—then places them in urban school districts to dramatically improve the quality of education for America's students. The Academy is run like an executive training program. Participants attend extended weekend sessions over the course of 10 months, while continuing to work in their current jobs. The Broad

Superintendents Academy is a unique training program because of its comprehensive approach to developing successful district school leaders. The combination of training, career placement assistance and continuing support services provides Fellows with the tools necessary to succeed in a large urban school district (Retrieved April 19, 2012 from <http://www.broadacademy.org.html>).

One of the most notable aspects of the Broad Academy is that its candidates are not required to be superintendents, or even educators, as some alumni are business or military leaders in the community. However, the process for selection to the Broad Academy is a very rigorous one, involving three distinct phases: a 60-minute phone interview; a 90-minute virtual interview (and impact submission); and a full day of in-person interviews in Los Angeles, California for those candidates that make it to the final round. While those alumni of the Broad Academy are not licensed as superintendents or receiving academic degrees as a result of their two years in the program, they are exposed to what is arguably a unique style of professional development for the urban superintendency (Retrieved August 26, 2018 from <https://www.broadcenter.org/broad-academy/>).

Based on the evidence from the literature, referenced above, it is appropriate to continue study of the phenomenon of superintendent pre-service preparation. To be sure, information gleaned from the AASA decennial studies from 1923 to 2010 will be used as a template for study, along with the research conducted by those other authors who have made valuable and lasting contributions to the literature regarding superintendent preparation. The specifics of how this new study of superintendent preparation was conducted is explained, in detail, in the following chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

As evidenced by the review of the literature, superintendents must be educated and well-prepared leaders if they are to be successful in meeting the unique needs of a school district. Whether the domains of knowledge that these leaders have been exposed to include school law, school finance, and/or managing community resources, the successful superintendent will have to draw from all her education and experiences in order to make the types of decisions that will positively impact all those students under her supervision. Therefore, a superintendent has to be able to trust in the degree of expertise that she has obtained in order to delegate, manage, and sustain the school system with which she has been entrusted.

But, how does she know if she is prepared to do the job? Is preparation a function of the level of education and, if so, does the coursework that she successfully completed matter, in her opinion? Are superintendents prepared to do the jobs that their district boards of education expect of them? And, if not, then what do they need to know how to do that they do not know how to do, and what can universities do (through the structure of course work, the internship, and other experiences) to ensure that they are prepared for the very difficult jobs that await them? The purpose of this study was to help answer these questions by interviewing North Carolina superintendents to solicit their opinions regarding the adequacy of their pre-service academic preparedness for the superintendency.

Research Design

It is worthy of mention that, originally, this researcher planned to conduct a mixed methods study as a means of investigating North Carolina superintendents' perceptions of preparedness for the superintendency. An online survey was sent to all North Carolina superintendents, designed to assess their level of preparedness for the superintendency and their views regarding academic preparation, to be followed by interviews of those superintendents who expressed interest in providing additional insights. But, after several unsuccessful attempts to increase the response rate, less than 10% of the usable surveys were returned, which yielded unusable statistical data. This necessitated a change in the research design from a mixed methods study to a purely qualitative one, where a smaller sample of superintendents shared their perceptions of preparedness for the superintendency.

One way to gather information from superintendents regarding their perceptions of what they needed to know and how well they were prepared was to interview them. Using an interview protocol, designed for the purpose of eliciting qualitative data regarding perceptions of preparedness for the superintendency, interview questions were asked of North Carolina superintendents selected via snowball sampling techniques. This method of data collection was appropriate, given the difficulty in attempting to survey all the superintendents in North Carolina to ask the same questions. The aim was to answer the research questions of this study by conducting these interviews of school superintendents, and perform an analysis of the data gathered from these interviews to draw conclusions for future research and to inform practice, specifically in regard to superintendent preparation programs. The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of North Carolina superintendents regarding their preparation for the superintendency. The researcher sought a

deep understanding of the superintendents' perspectives and experiences, since they acted as district leaders in, arguably, one of the most important jobs in the North Carolina public school system.

Rationale and Approach

In order to better understand what we know as the human experience, and the individuality of persons and situations, qualitative research was a necessary element of inquiry. Through the lens of the participants in the study, the researcher was better able to understand these people, their experiences, and their exchanges (Creswell, 2007). Therefore, the researcher could better understand the real meaning attributed to their experiences. According to Creswell, qualitative research was an appropriate approach to study when understanding was needed that could only be gained by talking with people and hearing their stories (2007). However, this had to be done without the opinions of the researcher, or the researchers that came before, unduly influencing the stories that were told. This differed from quantitative studies, where the researcher was detached from the research, and used only numerical representations of experiences as opposed to the word representations used by qualitative researchers to describe these personal experiences (Creswell, 2007). As this study sought to better understand how North Carolina superintendents perceived their preparation for the superintendency, through their own individualized lens, a qualitative approach to study was most deemed appropriate.

Qualitative Approach to Study

As noted above, the researcher sought to answer the research questions of this study using a qualitative approach. Data were collected via interviews with North Carolina superintendents to better understand their perceptions of preparedness for the

superintendency. An advantage of this type of approach to study was that the researcher could review and revise the qualitative tools and processes throughout the study. However, the role of interpretation was important, especially in regard to maintaining objectivity while making observation and determining meaning. And, if the goal was to ensure accurate interpretation, the researcher sometimes has to change the research design (Stake, 2006).

Research Questions

The research questions for this study of the perceptions of North Carolina superintendents regarding their pre-service academic preparedness were as follows:

- How do North Carolina school superintendents perceive their overall preparedness for the superintendency, including preparedness by university master's and/or doctoral programs, if they received such education?
- What domains of knowledge do North Carolina superintendents perceive as most and least important to the superintendency?
- How could superintendent preparation be improved, and what would be the best method(s) for preparing future superintendents?

Sample Selection

For this study, the sample consisted of four North Carolina superintendents, chosen from the parameters of any sitting or past superintendent in North Carolina. These four superintendents were interviewed and their responses studied in order to better understand their perceptions of preparedness for the superintendency. A purposeful sampling methodology (with a focus on snowball-sampling techniques) was determined to be the best means of gaining this knowledge of North Carolina superintendent preparation. Purposeful

sampling was defined as “selecting cases that are likely to be information-rich with respect to the purposes of a qualitative research study (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p. 650).

Using purposeful sampling and snowball-sampling techniques, the researcher chose four superintendents from North Carolina for study. Utilization of purposeful and snowball sampling allowed for the strategic selection of NC superintendents, identified by other North Carolina superintendents as school leaders whose perceptions regarding preparedness for the superintendency could provide valuable insight to the researcher and this study. It is important to note that in qualitative research, snowball sampling was the most common type of purposeful sampling. This methodology began by determining potential participants who met the parameters of the study. These participants suggested the researcher speak with new participants, thus the number of people studied “snowballed” and became bigger with time, providing rich information in each case (Merriam, 1998).

In this study, North Carolina superintendents who were interviewed suggested other North Carolina superintendents who they thought would provide valuable insight regarding their perceptions of preparedness for the superintendency. But, the first determinant for selection, as suggested by Stake (2006), was to maximize what could be gleaned from the interviews. The time required to conduct research in the field and to meet with and study participants was marked; therefore, it was important to pick participants that were easily accessible and willing to talk (Stake, 2006). And, as was found by the researcher to be true, Yin (1987) stated that gaining this access to the field is more of a process than an event. As superintendents, sitting or retired, could be difficult to gain an audience with, the researcher had to manage these interactions with these school leaders, whose time and sage advice were wanton by many, in order to be minimally intrusive.

At the end of the interview, each superintendent was asked to provide some names of other North Carolina superintendents whose perceptions regarding preparation for the superintendency might further the study. Names of potential participants were also compared, after having conducted some interviews, as multiple participants tended to identify particular superintendents in North Carolina that they thought would be worthy of contact. With this information, the researcher was able to identify four North Carolina superintendents who were willing to give their time to further this study of superintendent preparation. Each superintendent in the study was contacted by email with an invitation to participate and agreed to be interviewed and have the interview recorded to aid with transcription by the researcher. Too, the researcher scheduled a date and time for the interview to take place using this tool. Introductory protocols and important information were read to the superintendent participants and they signed informed consent forms before the interviews started.

Data Collection

Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) pointed out that the main tool and measuring instrument of qualitative study was the researcher, because of the close interactions with the participants and the way that data were collected using this methodology. There was a plethora of tools available for potential use in this qualitative research: documents; records; interviews; observations; artifacts; journals; e-mails; videos; and photos (Creswell, 2007). Interviews were determined to be the best means of data collection for this particular study of superintendent preparation.

The researcher was as prepared as possible for each foray into the field by having some familiarity with the superintendents to be interviewed and ensured that a tested interview protocol was in place before the first interview was conducted. Notes were also taken using the interview protocol tool as a guide during the interview process; it was not determined that there was a need for other forms of data collection. As proved to be the case for this researcher, Merriam posited that the researcher is already analyzing the data, even as it is being collected (1998). These types of interviews consisted of pre-determined questions; however, the researcher could make some minor changes as the need arose during the interview process. This also included changing the wording of questions and defining or elaborating if needed (Merriam, 1998).

The interviews for this study occurred on a date and time selected by the participant, due to the busy schedules of the present or past North Carolina superintendents. And through the use of this type of semi-structured interview procedure, the researcher was able to gather each superintendent's perception of preparedness for the superintendency in a way that was less awkward for the participant and the researcher. Semi-structured interviews also allowed for cross-case comparability in this study of superintendent preparation. In order to encourage the superintendent participants of this study to elaborate on their answers, probes were interwoven into the interview protocol. This interview protocol (see Appendix A) included questions such as, "Overall, how well do you feel you were prepared for the superintendency?" and "What domains of knowledge do you perceive as most important to the superintendency?" These questions, tied closely to prior study and literature in the arena of superintendent preparedness, sought to understand more about perceptions of

preparedness, domains of knowledge, ideas for improvement, and methodologies for preparing superintendents.

Berg (2001) suggested that researchers include different types of questions in the interview guide, and this researcher took this into account when structuring the guide for this study. Obviously, this included the most essential questions designed to answer the major research questions for the study. Berg further noted that it is up to the researcher whether or not these questions are more scattered or clustered in the protocol. Questions that were used to establish rapport at the beginning of the interview are known as throwaway questions; this researcher chose background information regarding the number of years the superintendents had worked in their various leadership and educational roles to create this effect (Berg, 2001). Berg also pointed out that “extra” questions are those researchers use in order to restate a question in different way, usually to ensure clarity. Probes were chosen to be part of the interview, in order to elicit even more information from the interviewee. Additionally, the researcher followed steps suggested to ensure the quality of the interview guide (Berg, 2001).

The researcher implemented feedback from the expert researchers at North Carolina State University, as they examined the questions and reviewed the guide to be used. Too, Yin (1987) suggested ensuring the questions and procedures would work in the field setting by conducting a pilot test; so, this was conducted with colleagues before the first real interview in the field took place. Once these suggestions by Yin (1987) were followed, it was determined that the interview guide was ready for use in the study of superintendent preparation. The researcher then conducted the interviews at times that were determined to be convenient for the study participants. Especially because of the busy schedules of the

superintendents being studied, email was used as a means of communicating with these selected participants in order to arrange these interviews. Although the researcher was prepared to conduct follow-up questioning with the study's participants via email or phone, this was not necessary, as all questions were sufficiently answered during the initial interviews.

Robson (2002) also provided important guidance regarding how to properly conduct an interview; this advice was taken into account during each phase of the interview process. First, Robson (2002) suggested that the interviewer introduce himself and describe the purpose of the study. It is here that the researcher assured anonymity, gained the participant's permission to record the interview, and fielded any queries the participant might have. Next, using the previously described interview guide, the researcher asked the participants those interview questions needed to answer the research questions established for the study. After the participants had fully answered each of these questions to the researchers liking, the participants were thanked for their participation and the interview was concluded. Next, the researcher utilized the digital audio files that were recorded during the interview for transcription. Then, the researcher fully transcribed the interviews in order to analyze the perceptions of the participating superintendents. It was suggested by Stake (2006) that time be taken by the researcher after an interview to reflect on keynotes and what was said. Therefore, forty-five minutes were scheduled by the researcher solely for reflection following each interview with one of the North Carolina superintendents.

Data Analysis Procedures

Stake (2006) pointed out two ways that researchers could arrive at new meaning by analyzing cases: One, through direct interpretation of each individual case, or two, through

an aggregation of events that lead to an overall connection within the cases. For this study, data were taken from each North Carolina superintendent, as well as a comparing and contrasting of data for all the superintendents were analyzed. As Creswell (2007) suggested, this data analysis began by displaying and organizing the data, using coding procedures to determine themes and condense the data, and finally illuminating the data through discussion. For this study, the researcher decided to keep the data organized from the beginning of collection, due to the amount of qualitative data being managed.

This researcher followed Maxwell's (2005) advice and listened to the audio recording before reviewing the notes from the interview protocol guide. Then, to further the analysis, the researcher took notes with the goal of attempting to determine themes in the discussions recorded with the superintendents (Maxwell, 2005). Next, the researcher created word-for-word, extremely accurate transcripts of the interviews, in what proved to be a somewhat tedious but fruitful process. Having to listen to the recordings over and over to ensure accuracy of transcription allowed the researcher to hear the interview questions and responses many times, and overarching themes became more and more obvious. This process truly provided a rich lens through which to view the interview participants, as Maxwell suggested (2005).

The researcher also followed the advice of Creswell (2007) and sorted the transcriptions into codes based on the predominant themes, made notes along the way, and looked for connections in the data as the discussions between researcher and superintendent were reread many times. Per Creswell's (2003) suggestion, the researcher also allowed codes that were not based in the first layer of obvious themes to emerge naturally as analysis occurred. Yin (1987) posited that researchers should be on the lookout for similarities and

differences in the data through use the constant-comparison process. Therefore, this researcher read/reviewed all the interview transcripts many times in order to inundate themes until no new insights emerged. These data were closely examined through the process of interpretational analysis to identify the patterns and themes in the data (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007) Constant comparison between and among the different cases revealed significant connections and variations for further exploration. Often associated with grounded theory, the constant comparative method was determined to be an appropriate approach for this particular study. In fact, Merriam (1998) states that, “[b]ecause the basic strategy of the constant comparative method is compatible with the inductive, concept-building orientation of all qualitative research, the constant comparative method of data analysis has been adopted by many researchers who are not seeking to build substantive theory” (p. 228). With this particular study, each layer of analysis informed later data collection, and themes surfaced that provided direction for future inquiry and analysis.

Determining these themes and categories was of one of the most important steps that the researcher implemented, and was critical to interpretational analysis, according to Gall, Gall, & Borg (2007). Although some researchers came up with their own categories and themes, other researchers based these categories on the themes already illuminated in the research, like Ryan & Bernard (2003), who suggested the use of literature reviews as excellent sources of themes/subthemes for the new researcher. The researcher in this study looked at the themes that emerged in the existing literature surrounding: overall perceptions of superintendents regarding pre-service academic preparedness; those domains of knowledge deemed most important (and unimportant); superintendents' suggestions for improving preparation programs; and perceptions regarding best methodologies for preparing

superintendents; these were used as a basis for thematic analysis. Other themes and categories that emerged involved the perceived quality of professors and classes, practical versus theoretical approaches to preparation, and coaching/mentoring/internship models and methodologies.

This study was conducted in hopes of providing a better understanding of North Carolina superintendents' perceptions of preparedness for the superintendency. The themes identified in the literature surrounded overall perceptions of preparedness, domains of knowledge, how to improve preparation programs, and the best methods for preparing superintendents. Once each superintendent was interviewed, the researcher analyzed the interview data and highlighted themes that became evident throughout the qualitative data sets.

Research Validity and Reliability

Yin (1987) pointed out that a credible qualitative study must be transparent, methodical, and evidence-based. Therefore, the researcher made a point to describe and chart the research procedures in such a way that other readers and researchers could understand how this research was conducted. Too, the data were collected methodically in order to ensure its organization and availability for review. The researcher conducted this research by orderly means, followed the pre-established procedures, and crosschecked procedures and data in order to minimize error as well as unexplained bias. The researcher served as the research instrument and utilized available tools, such as the interview protocol, to jot down thoughts and ideas, questions, and problems. Lastly, the researcher used these data, analyzed and collected in a fair way, to draw conclusions.

To ensure that the research is trustworthy, Lincoln and Guba (1990) promoted extended engagement in the field of research, checking any interpretations against the raw data, triangulation, and member checking. Lincoln and Guba also recommended that the methods for data collection, coding, and drawing conclusions were transparent. And, to bolster the validity and reliability of the study, the researcher used triangulation methods and member checked the data. Stake wrote that a researcher needs “discipline and protocols that do not depend on mere intuition and good intention to get it right” (2006, p. 107).

When conducting qualitative research, the specific use of these protocols could be referred to as triangulation. In short, triangulating ensured that what was observed and what was reported were the same thing across situations. Collecting information from various sources (e.g. multiple interview subjects) was a type of triangulation (Stake, 2006). Maxwell (2005) explained that this process protected validity by reducing systematic bias and the limitations that would result from a single source of data. A broader and sound understanding of issues surrounding the topic of study was also provided. Stake also stated that triangulation ensured that the researcher had not been biased, had not misled the reader, and had painted the picture as clearly as possible (Stake, 2006). Interviewing and collecting data from multiple sources allowed for the triangulation of data and bolstered the trustworthiness (and validity) of the results.

Member checking was also used in this study as a means of triangulating the data. The superintendents were offered to review the transcripts of their interviews to provide feedback and ensure accuracy. Although these transcripts were offered to the participants for review, none provided additional comments and/or revision requests. The researcher made a point to avoid sharing personal experiences regarding preparation with the superintendent

participants during the interview. Too, the researcher later bracketed (in the written transcriptions) any areas of potential bias in order to minimize any influence this might have had on the research. Creswell (2007) pointed out that this should also be done to increase the information shared by participants, as their perceptions are the crux of study.

Subjectivity Statement

The researcher was a 19-year veteran educator who taught as a special education teacher, at the middle and high school level for eight years, served as an assistant principal for nine years, and then led as a principal for two years. He has served in leadership positions at Title I, turnaround, and North Carolina Schools of Distinction. The researcher has learned about creating a positive culture and climate in rural and urban public schools in North Carolina, implemented PLCs (professional learning communities) with fidelity, and provided feedback to stakeholders in a data-informed environment with the intent of continuous improvement. He has trained with principals who were adept at turning around North Carolina schools that were at-risk. This researcher has been a part of creating a climate of accountability in schools, with a common focus on the individualized needs of students and staff to ensure growth and achievement. The researcher has provided professional development and learning opportunities for cohorts at the local, district, and state level. He believes that the quality preparation of superintendents is an important component that contributes to the success of public schools.

Ethical Issues

The researcher provided the objectives of the study to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at North Carolina State University. He discussed how human subjects participating in the study would be protected, the interactions that would occur between the researcher and

participant(s), and which instruments would be used for study. Yin (1987) explained that ethical standards require that the researcher ensure the protection of all human subjects. Therefore, the researcher obtained formal approval for the research from the Institutional Review Board at North Carolina State University.

He gained informed consent from all research participants by informing them of the nature of the study, and why their input was needed. Another layer of protection was provided for this study because there was no need for deception of the subjects. The privacy and confidentiality of all the study participants was also ensured by the researcher, to make sure no harm would come to the subjects as a result of their participation in the study. Any conditions that might influence the study were disclosed to ensure that the study was one of integrity. As Yin (1987) suggested, even roles and characteristics of the researcher, that might have affected methods, were disclosed.

The researcher was a veteran educator who was serving as a school administrator during the research. And, the researcher had participated in preparation programs for the role of the superintendency. Because of these similarities with the participants, in regard to leadership roles held, and commonalities in preparation experiences, the researcher was well positioned to conduct this research. Too, it is important to note that the researcher remained objective throughout the study and aimed to minimize the effects of his experience on the study.

Limitations of the Study

Stake (1995) pointed out that qualitative studies are not as strong when it comes to generalizing to a population, when compared to other research designs. This study was

limited to four North Carolina superintendents; therefore, the potential for generalization was also limited. Utilizing interviews as a tool for study also led to research limitations. The time constraints of the interview process certainly resulted in inherent limitations for this study. Finally, the fact that superintendents who were interviewed were reflecting on training that occurred years ago resulted in limitations, given that superintendent preparation and training may have changed since then.

Too, the interview process might have been uncomfortable for some participants; this may have caused the subjects to give less thorough answers, versus what could have been provided in the privacy of completing a survey at home. The subjects could have also been worried about confidentiality, regardless of the assurances of the researcher. This could have caused the participants to give less honest answers to some of the interview questions.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the overall design and methodology of the study was described by the researcher. This study of the perceptions of school superintendents, in regard to educational pre-service academic preparedness and the domains of knowledge that encompass the superintendency, aimed to inform the literature by interviewing North Carolina superintendents to gain a better idea of their views on how they should be trained and what they should be able to do once they are given the opportunity to serve as the primary leader of a district school system.

Answering these questions by interviewing North Carolina superintendents for their opinions regarding the adequacy of their preparedness for the superintendency was the

purpose of this study. Their responses assisted in answering the following research questions:

- How do North Carolina school superintendents perceive their overall preparedness for the superintendency, including preparedness by university master's and/or doctoral programs, if they received such education?
- What domains of knowledge do North Carolina superintendents perceive as most and least important to the superintendency?
- How could superintendent preparation be improved, and what would be the best method(s) for preparing future superintendents?

Too, the need for a qualitative approach, in regards to data collection and analysis for this research, was explained. The interviews of the responding superintendents were analyzed to compare data from this study with similar studies that were previously conducted, and to answer the research questions specifically designed for this study. These data were compared to the research questions and the primary analysis for this study was constructed from these findings.

The researcher also described how he planned to ensure that the findings of this study could be trusted. Although this study had many limitations, due mainly to the nature of interviews, but also due to those logistical factors present in conducting any research, it was the researcher's hope that these limitations did not significantly limit the provision of further insights into a facet of study that might be useful to educational researchers and practitioners alike.

Certainly, it was important to gain a greater understanding of the superintendency and what must be done to best prepare our future school leaders. It followed that feedback from

current superintendents was an appropriate means of gaining such insight. This study aimed to further embellish the literature that had already been written about the adequacy of pre-service academic preparedness of school superintendents, as well as those domains of knowledge that North Carolina superintendents deemed worthy of study and, hopefully, the following findings will be of use for academicians and all others interested in this particular aspect of the superintendency.

Finally, the researcher provided a personal biography, as well as a discussion of ethical considerations and how these were integrated into the research design of the study. The ethical underpinnings of the study were designed to protect the anonymity of the school superintendents.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of North Carolina school superintendents regarding their preparation for the superintendency. The following research questions structure the study:

- How do North Carolina school superintendents perceive their overall preparedness for the superintendency, including preparedness by university master's and/or doctoral programs, if they received such education?
- What domains of knowledge do North Carolina superintendents perceive as most and least important to the superintendency?
- How could superintendent preparation be improved, and what would be the best method(s) for preparing future superintendents?

The focus of this research was to add to the knowledge base regarding superintendent preparation and reveal implications for universities that are preparing these school leaders. A case study design was utilized for this study. This chapter provides an analysis of the data gathered through interviews from each superintendent.

In 2016, the researcher began to identify sitting or past superintendents in North Carolina in order to conduct a case study of superintendents' perceptions of their preparedness for the superintendency. The superintendents were chosen using snowball sampling techniques. Once the researcher identified each superintendent and received approval for participation in the study, he contacted each superintendent to schedule an interview and begin the process of data collection. The researcher provided a detailed

explanation of the study, its purpose, and the process by which he would collect data from interviews with them.

The first interviews with superintendents were conducted in August 2016, just before the start of the 2016-2017 school year. Each participant signed the Informed Consent Form for Research before the interviews began. Each interview followed a protocol of open-ended questions [See Appendix A], was recorded using a laptop and audio recording software, as well as a Sony ICD PX333 Digital Voice Recorder, and was transcribed verbatim by the researcher. All superintendents were assigned pseudonyms to protect confidentiality. These interviews with superintendents were conducted to provide their perspectives and gain insight into their perceptions regarding their preparedness for the superintendency.

Participants and Background Information

Steven Rogers, Ph.D.

Dr. Steven Rogers was the first superintendent chosen for study, selected because of proximity and accessibility to the researcher. At the time of the interview, Dr. Rogers was beginning his 41st year of work in the arena of education. Steven had been a superintendent in the urban district that he was serving for two calendar years when the interview was conducted. Dr. Rogers shared that he had been in administration for six years in the North Carolina county he was currently working in, five years in a nearby rural school district in North Carolina, and six years working as an administrator in another state, for a total of 17 years of service as a school administrator. Steven had worked as a superintendent for 11 years in total, serving for 5 five years outside of North Carolina, four years in a rural North Carolina district, and two years in his current role as superintendent of a large urban district in North Carolina. The highest degree that Dr. Rogers received was a Ph.D. from the

University of Maryland. “Fear the turtle,” he added, at the conclusion of the interviewee’s background information component of the interview.

Scott Summers, Ed.D.

Dr. Scott Summers shared that he had been in education “from ’75 to now,” having served for 42 years. “God,” he added, seemingly surprising himself at the number of years he had in education once it was said out loud. At the time of the interview, Dr. Summers had been working as a consultant with an education consulting business he started eight years ago. Scott added that he had worked in school administration for “all but four” of his years in education, which came to a total of 28 years. As he mentioned, four of those 32 years working in education were as a teacher in the classroom, and the remaining 28 years were as an assistant principal, principal, assistant superintendent, and superintendent in North Carolina. Dr. Summers served for seven years as a superintendent in a rural district in the Piedmont region of North Carolina. Scott again reiterated that he had been working with his current educational consulting business for eight years, starting in January of 2008, when the articles of incorporation were approved. Dr. Scott Summers highest degree received was an Ed.D. from East Carolina University (ECU).

Jimmy Howlett, Ph.D.

Dr. Jimmy Howlett had been in education since 1972 at the time of the interview. “So, you add it up,” he quipped, “about 40 years.” When asked how long he had been working at his present institution, he added that, “I formally retired about 3 years ago; but, even then, now that I’m on the school board, it’s not working in [education], but it is.” Dr. Howlett shared that he had been working as a school administrator since 1979 and added that, “administration—I’m talking about both an administrator of schools and eight years

working for the Governor of North Carolina.” Dr. Howlett spent seven years in the District of Columbia running an education membership organization. Jimmy also pointed out that he had worked as a superintendent for nine years in total. When asked how many years he had been in his present position, he stated that, “This is my 3rd year; it’ll be three years in December.” Dr. Howlett received his highest degree, a Ph.D. in School Administration, from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Chuck Xavier, Ed.D.

At the time of the interview, Dr. Chuck Xavier had worked for 40 years in education, since 1978. Chuck pointed out that he had worked at the institution in which he was currently serving since 2004, as a consultant for “twenty-some states.” Dr. Xavier shared that he had worked in school administration “from the summer of ’81 ‘till fall of 2004.” Dr. Xavier pointed out that he had worked as a superintendent in North Carolina for 12 years in total. Dr. Xavier noted that he received his highest degree, an Ed.D., from North Carolina State University.

Table 4.1 is presented below as a summary of the interviewee background information gathered from these North Carolina superintendents:

Table 4.1. Interviewee Background Information

<i>Superintendent</i>	<i>Education Total Yrs.</i>	<i>Present Org. Yrs.</i>	<i>Admin. Total Yrs.</i>	<i>Super. Total Yrs.</i>	<i>Present Pos. Yrs.</i>
Dr. Steven Rogers	41	2	27	11	2
Dr. Scott Summers	42	8	28	7	8
Dr. Jimmy Howlett	43	3	24	9	3
Dr. Chuck Xavier	40	14	25	12	14

Presentation of Findings

This section features the findings and analysis of the data collected in the study. It is important to note that the analysis of data began at the start of the study and continued throughout the data collection period. This constant comparison uncovered significant connections between the cases that warranted further analysis. Each layer of analysis informed future data collection, and themes began to surface that provided direction for this study of superintendent preparation.

The interview questions that were asked of the superintendent participants were open-ended and allowed for longer narratives. Therefore, these responses were analyzed separately for recurring elements. Merriam (1998) explains that when content analysis is employed by qualitative researchers, “the communication of meaning is the focus” (p. 160). This means of analysis was utilized to identify themes that surfaced in the responses by the superintendents.

Wordle, an online tool that analyzes word frequencies, where the words selected for analysis appear in visual “clouds,” was used by the researcher to assist in the analysis of the superintendents’ responses. As described on the www.wordle.net homepage, “[t]he clouds give greater prominence to words that appear more frequently in the source text” (www.wordle.net).

McNaught and Lam (2010) are two researchers who have studied Wordle as a tool and written about its use in qualitative research. They explain that “an understanding of the general composition of the frequently used words allows viewers to have an overview of the main topics and the main themes in a text” (p. 630). This allows “researchers to quickly visualize some general patterns in text” (McNaught & Lam, 2010, p. 641). In short, “[w]ord

clouds can be a useful research tool to aid educational research" (McNaught & Lam, 2010, p. 641). Therefore, Wordle was utilized by the researcher as a first layer of analysis.

Figure 4.1 is presented to illustrate the word cloud created from the overall interviews that was used to determine revealed themes:

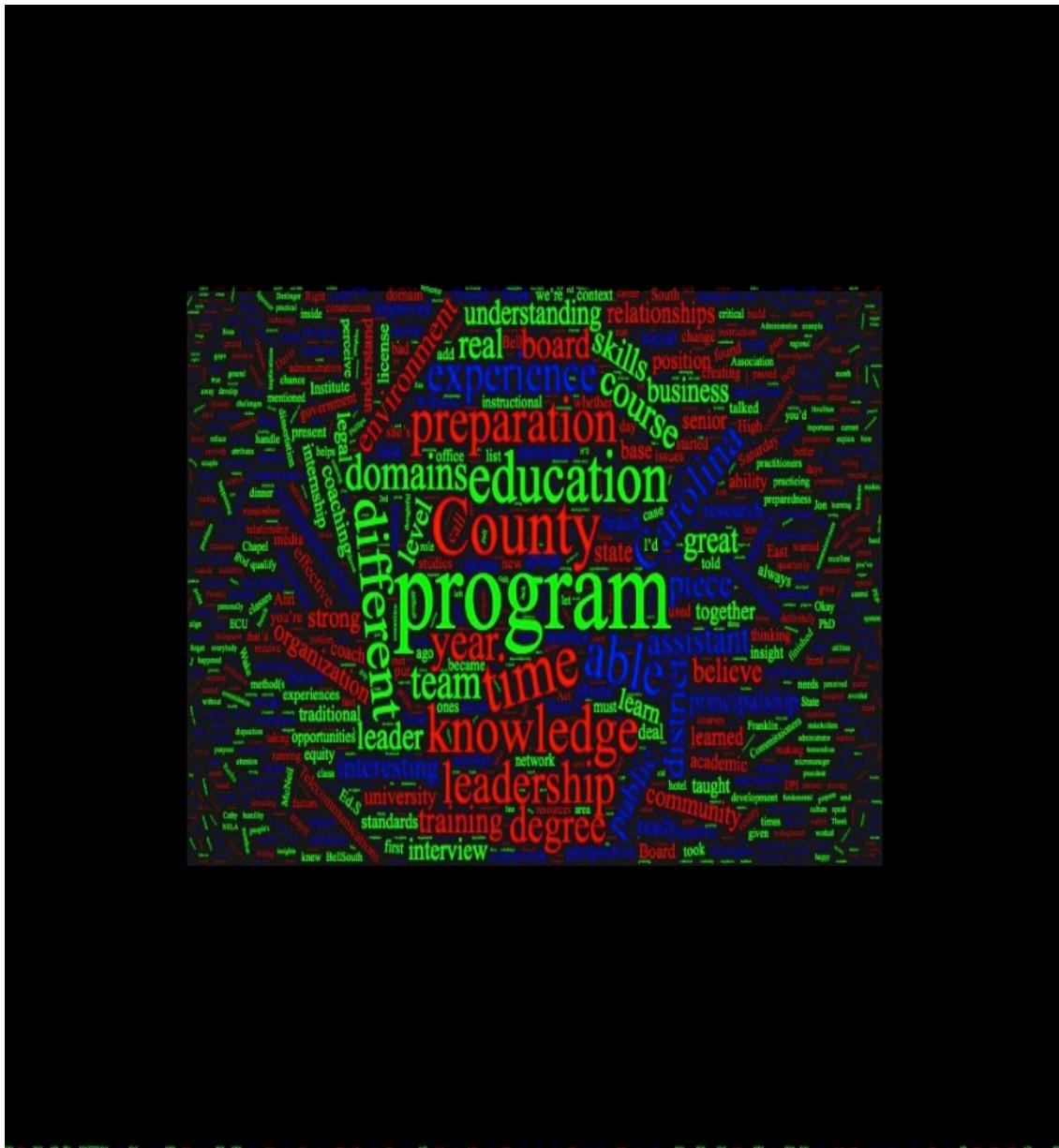


Figure 4.1. WordCloud of Overall Interview Responses

The interview protocol was specifically designed to elicit responses according to each of the three research questions; therefore, the use of interviews that elicited open-ended responses from the superintendents resulted in a variety of responses that could not be guessed or sorted ahead of time. Throughout the course of the research study, as North Carolina superintendents were interviewed and the qualitative data collected, these data were analyzed. Emerging patterns and themes were then denoted by the researcher and converted into codes. These themes were organized for visual analysis by noting the frequency of each code in Microsoft Excel, by superintendent participant. After all the interviews with North Carolina superintendents were complete, the codes were categorized by the research question with which they were related. Details regarding how the qualitative data and codes collected aligned to each of the three research questions that comprise the framework of this study are presented in the following sections:

Research Question 1: How do North Carolina school superintendents perceive their overall preparedness for the superintendency?

North Carolina superintendents' perceptions of overall preparedness for the superintendency were exposed in this study by its participants and the interview responses that they provided. In describing their perception of overall preparedness, most of the superintendents felt as if they were "prepared" or "well-prepared" for the superintendency. They attributed their perceptions of overall preparedness to a variety of factors, but themes and patterns did emerge with their responses.

While one superintendent mentioned the "situational" nature of the superintendency, and the difficulty of preparing superintendents because of this reality, the interview data also revealed that most superintendents credited "professors" and the "practical" and "relevant"

aspects of their preparation for the superintendency as important factors that affected their perceptions. Evidence of the superintendents' overall perceptions of preparedness for the superintendency was evident in the qualitative information gathered from the interviews. Recurrent themes were coded within the data from each case study, across the superintendents interviewed, and then categorized accordingly.

Table 4.2 illustrates the codes that emerged in regard to Research Question #1 and their frequency by superintendent interviewee:

Table 4.2: Research Question #1 Codes & Occurrence by Interviewee

<u>Codes</u>	<u>S. Rogers</u>	<u>S. Summers</u>	<u>J. Howlett</u>	<u>C. Xavier</u>
<i>Very Well/Remarkably Prepared</i>	X			X
<i>Prepared (Good/Fairly Well)</i>		X		
<i>Average</i>			X	
<i>Unprepared</i>				
<i>Very Unprepared</i>				

Overall Preparedness for the Superintendency

For this study, North Carolina superintendents were first asked how they perceived their overall preparedness for the superintendency. Interestingly, none of the superintendents interviewed reported that they felt they were “unprepared” or “not prepared” for the superintendency in North Carolina. However, it is important to note that the third superintendent interviewed, Dr. Jimmy Howlett, reported that, “I’d give it a C,” and then added, with a chuckle, “It did not exceed growth, either.” But, Dr. Howlett’s response to

Research Question #1 was the outlier in the group of North Carolina superintendents interviewed.

The first North Carolina superintendent interviewed, Dr. Steven Rogers, even shared that “I actually think I was *very* well prepared for the superintendency.” Dr. Chuck Xavier, the final superintendent interviewed for this study, stated that he thought his preparation for the superintendency was, “Remarkably good.” Professor Xavier then added that, “There were a few things that weren’t (good); but, it was the ‘90s.” The most interesting response was provided by Dr. Scott Summers, the third superintendent interviewed for this research study, who replied:

I feel like I was (prepared). How ready was I? I feel really good about that.

How ready did my university preparation program help me with that? That's two different questions. Because I feel like when I went into the superintendency, I was fairly well prepared for it. But I would attribute 90% of that to my leadership experiences versus my formal training.

Factors Contributing to Preparedness

When asked to expound upon their responses regarding overall preparedness for the superintendency, including what factors contributed to their perceptions of preparedness, the North Carolina superintendents interviewed attributed their feelings to the “practical” experiences they were offered in their degree programs, as well as the quality of professors who provided their training. Dr. Steven Rogers enthusiastically shared that he had, “Excellent training, both at the doctorate level and the Master’s level.”

Doctors Summers and Xavier both mentioned practical experiences as a factor that contributed to their perception of preparedness. Summers said:

It was a whole different time, but I feel good about the practical nature of my Ed.D. degree and my superintendent's license—work that I had at East Carolina, in that I had professors who were in the superintendency, who had been in the superintendency, and/or experienced principals. And can I feel good about their ability to talk about the reality of being of being a superintendent, and then in the academic coursework that I was involved in, it was, of course, outside the context of any standards. There weren't any standards in terms of this is what a good superintendent should look like, I'm going to say institutionalized. I mean there was research that obviously drove what the program was. They didn't just pick personnel leadership or personnel organization out of the air, they knew a superintendent needed to know about human resources and personnel. I don't even think they called it human resources. I think they called it personnel. And we did budgeting and those kind of things, and obviously board relationships. Community relationships was one of the courses, so the context of it, you know, was relevant. It was a very traditional, part time program, you know?

Dr. Charles Xavier agreed that he acquired “strong practical skills and experience” as a result of his overall preparation for the superintendency. Dr. Summers also added:

And, it was all about making sure that you as a superintendent knew how DPI (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction) worked and who the players were at DPI. And, how they were organized so that as you moved into school leadership, you knew you had some kind of experience and relationship with them, and also with tangential organizations like the School Board Association; so, during that internship experience you met with the School Administrators Association, you met with the North

Carolina School Boards Association. I think, going back—that was a long time ago—going back, like we even met with the local government commission, a lot of people. I didn't even know who the local government commission was, you know? And learned all about how school bonds have to be approved by them if you're going to have a construction program. So, I felt good about the relevance of it, even though we were using typewriters. You had your share of obviously academic research, but academic research was so different then than it is now.

Dr. Summers also mentioned, “experienced practitioners as professors” as one of the factors that contributed to his perception of preparedness for the superintendency. Again, Dr. Xavier agreed, stating that his preparation program was comprised of “strong professors... practitioner-scholars” that exhibited “academic prowess.” However, Dr. Jimmy Howlett somewhat disagreed with this sentiment:

Well you know, I got my degree in 1983 and spent that time from '75 to '83 working and doing both. And, you know with preparation, and time being a part of this whole equation, I'm not sure how well prepared a school of education or any program can be, be it an MBA, because it's very situational... And, the political structure of being superintendent was completely different in [Eastern Triangle County]. Completely different—it was politics on steroids. It was a terrible relationship with the commissioners and the school board. Commissioners did not want to fund schools. They were not a priority. Buildings were falling down and it was very difficult to break through with them. Things have changed now because [the Eastern Triangle County] is growing, but we're talking about in the '90s, and that was a whole different world. And you'd have business people down there who would say, ‘We

don't need these kids to get a high school diploma. I own a brick factory and they're going to want more money.' And that was an attitude that was not unusual. So I mean, how do you teach that? How do you teach situational politics? I got rid of 20 of the 22 principals in the first two years. How are you taught that? You know? That's one of the reasons I was brought in, and when I say 20 principals, I mean they were horrific. That system had just been in such a traditional non-academically oriented place and they were, but, we did it. And, you know, when I left, these people in place, the (new) superintendent didn't have to do any of that stuff. And, it was said to me repeatedly 'God, [Jimmy], thank you for doing this.' So how do you teach that?

In summary, when describing their perceptions of overall preparedness for the superintendency, most of the North Carolina superintendents interviewed felt as if they were prepared; none felt as if they were unprepared. This sense of preparedness was largely attributed to the practical and relevant nature of the experiences that they felt they were afforded. Too, specific mention was repeatedly given to having had professors in university courses who knew the work well because they had been practitioners in the field of educational leadership. In these discussions regarding overall preparedness for the superintendency and contributing factors, specific domains of knowledge and their importance also began to enter into the wider conversation.

Research Question 2: What domains of knowledge do North Carolina superintendents perceive as most (and least) important to the superintendency?

The domains of knowledge that North Carolina superintendents' perceived as most and least important to the superintendency were also uncovered in this study by its

superintendents and their chosen interview responses. The domain encompassing the interpersonal and micro-political relationships, often organized or classified as coursework devoted to human resources, was identified overwhelmingly as the most important domain to the superintendency. Interestingly, when asked which domain was the least important, Dr. Steven Rogers best summed up the sentiments of the group when he said, “Probably, there are none.” So, although a variety of domains were listed as most and least important throughout the course of the interviews, there were commonalities and themes that emerged in response to the second research question in this study of superintendent preparation.

Most Important Domains of Knowledge

When asked which domains of knowledge these North Carolina superintendents perceived as most important to the superintendency, their responses ran the gamut, but definite patterns surfaced in their answers to this research question. Some of their answers correlated with the classes that one most would likely associate with formal coursework befitting a superintendents’ preparation program, namely teaching, curriculum and instruction, and human resources.

Dr. Steven Rogers pointed out the importance of the domain of curriculum and instruction when he stated, “I am a knowledgeable superintendent, so I was well versed in curriculum and teaching kids how to read, write, and do math at a very high level from kindergarten to 12th grade.” Dr. Summers echoed this sentiment when he opined that,

I still think superintendents should have a pretty good handle on being able to identify what are the attributes of good teaching and good instruction, and good learning climates for students to be in... I was kind of perceived as an instructional leader as a

principal. But, you know good instructional leadership is beyond just the standards, beyond just the curriculum, and it's actually about the pedagogy, about the assessment, all those kind of things. So, I think a superintendent needs to have a good handle on that. I do think, obviously, the size of a school district does impact what skills and what knowledge is most important for a superintendent.

But, it was the human relations domain, encompassing the interpersonal, the micro-political, leadership development through delegation, and communication across stakeholders that most dominated the answers of the North Carolina superintendents interviewed to this second research question regarding the most important domain of knowledge. Dr. Summers shared that,

I guess the knowledge base around effective communication in relationships is pretty critical. I think you can be a real strong introvert and be an effective superintendent; but, you have to recognize if you're an introvert, you have to behave differently, and you can't not be out there—you gotta have visibility, you gotta have accessibility to people... The absolute importance of your knowledge base of what it takes to assemble, and put together, and grow, and nurture, and sustain a good team, is looking at the leadership development piece at every level—from your custodians and child nutrition front line workers, all the way through to your senior cabinet, senior team, to your principals, assistant principals, and teachers. So, I think that human resource piece of it is pretty critical. I don't know if this is a knowledge as much as this is a disposition, or an attribute, or skill. I think an effective superintendent has a real strong understanding of what they're what their real reality is; not what should it be like in our community, and what should be valued, and all of that, but what's the

actual reality of your environment. So, having that—enough of an emotional intelligence to understand what's happening around you—and how do you respond to that in terms of looking at quick wins versus long-term strategy. And, how high and how fast can you push, how much do you need to pull—a little bit of the intuitive piece of when do you let people stew on something, versus when has it stewed too long. You know it'll boil eventually, so I do think there is an artful side to being a superintendent, I think I found to be a pretty challenging, exciting, and dynamic role. Those are some of the things I think are fundamental, but every superintendency is going to be unique and different—being able to assimilate inside your environment of what the leadership need is.

Dr. Jimmy Howlett also agreed:

I perceive the superintendent as the leader of both an organization and a community leader. That interpersonal, micro-political, are the most important aspects of being a leader. And many, many, people don't have either one of those, or either/or of those, and invariably they get themselves in trouble. So I think that's clearly important. And, related to that is the skills for working with the school board ‘cause I can guarantee you there's always one in the crowd who's just a pain in the ass. How do you deal with him? Like firing a principal and him coming on the school board.

Dr. Charles Xavier agreed with the superintendents above when he stated, “The micro-political/interpersonal domain is huge.” Xavier specifically listed “the capacity to work well with others, build capacity, empower and delegate,” and defined this domain as “extraordinarily important.” Also within this domain, he mentioned the importance of “recruiting and hiring capable folks” and the ability to “grow and discover the capabilities of

others” as critical elements. But, perhaps Dr. Steven Rogers summed it up best when he replied, “I think so much of it; it’s about relationships.”

However, it is also important to note that other domains were mentioned by the superintendents interviewed as important to the superintendency, although there was not the same strength in the patterns observed with these domains. Dr. Scott Summers pointed out that:

I think having a strong background in Constitutional law, as it relates to education, and then administrative law as it relates to your state and your district policy manual... I think that's non-, in my opinion, that's non-negotiable. Because, it's one of those things where, when you get into a sensitive situation, you really want to have enough confidence in your knowledge that you know when to slow down, when to stop, when to seek external views and perspectives on things... So, I think that knowledge of the legal part is critical.

Dr. Charles Xavier also listed “legal issues” as one of the most important domains, echoing this sentiment by Dr. Summers. Too, Xavier mentioned “situational leadership,” which repeated an earlier sentiment by Dr. Howlett when he mentioned the difficulty in designing any preparation program for superintendents due to the “situational” nature and reality of the job. Lastly, Summers opined that:

I think the whole knowledge base and domain of organizational planning and development and execution... goes beyond just a business function. That goes into actually creating an organization. It is a learning organization, and how are you trying to continuously improve that? So, I think that's a key part... I think most superintendencies are not Charlotte-Mecks, and Wakes, and Guilfords, and stuff like

that... Under the organizational piece, I guess I would talk about the ability to strategically align all your resources with what your priorities are, in terms of what're the top priorities inside the organization to move it forward, so the whole piece of being able to identify your purpose as a district, create understanding, understanding around your district's identity, in terms of its vision and its mission, and what it values, and then how to create a strategy around that.

Least Important Domains of Knowledge

Conversely, the superintendents interviewed pointed out those domains of knowledge that they felt were least important to the superintendency. Their responses echoed earlier statements in which it was offered that those domains of knowledge that were less important were those that were the least associated with acquiring the situational leadership and interpersonal skill sets needed for the superintendency. Budgeting, law, transportation, maintenance, and any other domains that might be associated with micromanagement were specifically mentioned by the North Carolina superintendents that were interviewed for this study. However, half of the superintendents interviewed offered that there were *no* domains of knowledge that were least important.

When asked about what domains of knowledge were least important to the superintendency, Dr. Steven Rogers simply stated, with a chuckle, “Probably, there are none.” He elaborated that:

Business and finance, that’s the area where I received absolutely no training. And then curriculum—I do believe that the superintendent can’t just be a good manager. You can take the coach in off the football field and say you’re going to make him a superintendent. I think that you have a superintendent who is

knowledgeable of not only what to teach but how to teach. But, then, if this is a domain, I think these are all competing A-plus domains here. Research and accountability, I think is another domain... I think that, you know, my degree is a research degree. My goal was not to be a superintendent. I never wanted to be a principal. My goal was to teach at the university. So, I can read research reports and be able to not only understand them, but know which ones are good and which ones are not. So, I think that if that's one of the domains, I don't see how that's least important. If I had to pick one from everything, it has to be it has to be what you all down here call micro-political; it's the personal relationships you have to develop at every single level... You know, I walk out of here, I stop and talk to the guys are cutting the grass and they go, "You know, no one has ever stopped and talked to us." You know, I think that's as important as talking to members of the board or talking to a principal in a school. But people want to know that they have a superintendent who is steering the ship, but also is not forgetting, has his eye on every department, you know, every service.

Dr. Scott Summers echoed this sentiment when he stated that, "They're all important, which is what's tricky about this." He added that:

I think it's going to come back to how strong is your team? So, if your team has incredible strength in certain areas, then those domains are probably of less significance because you got your team to make up for that. Part of what we're looking at here is, if you had to set up coursework for a future superintendent, you know it's going to be three years' worth of coursework, and a limited number of courses that one's going to be able to take, then what are you going to prioritize

versus what things, what classes, again what that means of knowledge maybe we can say... I'm just kind of thinking about that I didn't specifically mention, but I would hope that what I said if you sat down and reflected on, 'You know, did [Scott] think that culture was important?' I would like to think that I said something about that, so let me say specifically culture. I haven't talked at all about the influence of technology and social media. I think those things are important, but not like your larger visioning organizational ability kind of thing. I guess it's kind of talking about, relative to understanding, your current environment and I'm trying to come back to your question of least important. Look at your current environment and how important that is, and how do you strategically make sure that there's a commitment to the vision and the mission of the school in the school district. I guess that that whole piece is how are you, if you subscribe to the belief that an organization is doing one or two things, it's either getting better getting worse, right? Of the whole thing, how do you lead, manage, facilitate change? I think that's one of the major challenges—how do you really prepare people to be in that environment in terms of being most important, and all of that around what is driven by what I see as the complexity of, what not only the job is, but the context of the job, and cultural context in a given community, as well as in the state and even in the nation. You know, looking at it to changing, the changing environment, how do I respond to that? But the complexity of the change is environment, and how do you stay innovative but not be stupid, and I think we've seen some stupid stuff in public education, and not intentionally. So, you know, I think you've got to be able to set to kind of balance that out. I don't know... I think the university program needs to really be driven by

doing what you're here trying to do. What are the knowledge, skills, disposition, attributes, of a soon-to-be graduate of this program, what do those look like, and how do we align the curriculum in the experiences to do that?

However, Dr. Jimmy Howlett was very specific about which domains of knowledge were least important when he was interviewed, and listed off particular domains such as budgeting, law, transportation, and maintenance that he saw as less critical than some of the other domains. He also offered that:

The technical stuff, like budgeting, and all that—that was a waste of time. Because, you know, from my perspective, it had nothing to do with the way things were done in North Carolina. It certainly didn't have anything to do with how county commissioners operate...And, that wasn't being mean or negative; it's just the way it is...How do you deal with this thing at the bottom of this, in the other direction; law, budgeting, buses and mass transportation, and maintenance—while these are all important, most of those are day-to-day administrative operations. I don't think they're nearly as important as the leadership, and being seen out, and so on and so forth. You hire really good people. If you don't hire really good people to run those, or get rid of people who can't do them, whose fault is that? It's yours.

However, Dr. Charles Xavier answered this query regarding which domain of knowledge was the least important most succinctly. He suggested that spending, “Not much time reflecting on what doesn’t matter” was the most important thing to take into account. According to Xavier, “micromanaging” was the least important of all the domains of knowledge.

Research Question #3: How could superintendent preparation be improved, and what would be the best method(s) for preparing future superintendents?

When North Carolina superintendents who participated in this study were asked how superintendent preparation might be improved, they provided a variety of responses that illuminated their perceptions regarding this research question. First, there was consensus across the board, as all of the NC superintendents mentioned that preparation programs for superintendents should be designed to be situational and relevant, with a clinical/practicum component. Too, most of the superintendents specifically mentioned mentors or coaches as a needed element of any quality superintendent preparation program. Half of the North Carolina superintendents interviewed also stated that they thought superintendent preparation programs needed to be comprised of practitioners who were aware of the type of work for which their students would need to be prepared. Too, some of the superintendents specifically noted that there needed to be an academic or scholarly component to the preparation programs designed for superintendents. Finally, the need for a focus on leadership in coursework and programming was also mentioned by two of the superintendents interviewed for this study.

Dr. Steven Rogers stated that, “You know, I've never had a course on how to be a superintendent. What I have had is instruction on how to be a good leader. And, you know, that's what the coaching is about—how do you continue to be a good leader?” He further provided his thoughts on how superintendent preparation might be improved by stating:

I think that if I was constructing a program to train superintendents, okay, there would definitely be classes; there would have to be, because I do believe that they have to be

well grounded in the domains, all those domains I just talked about. But, I almost think that is secondary to real on-the-job training—more of a clinical experience, a real clinical experience, and I think that's one of the things that NELA did with those principal trainees with the excellent principals...I think that there are very sure to be training programs out there, I mean The Broad Institute, I think that what they do is almost exactly what I just described. They steep them in the academic part, but then they are assigned a mentor, a coach, who are in other people's districts...I mean when did you really learn how to be a principal? On the job—with a background, though.

Dr. Scott Summers also provided his thoughts regarding what could be done to improve superintendent preparation. He shared that, “Well, we're in a state where there's no requirements to be a superintendent, other than you have to have a majority vote of the local Board of Education; so, there's no requirements and no standards, than they want to get a superintendent license. Then, the university that you're preparing under, they have to have a program that's aligned to do that right.” Summers also shared his other thoughts and opinions regarding how superintendent preparation could be improved:

I don't think you could possibly ever have enough relevance added to the program of study, whether it's through designing or creating case studies, or practicing case studies. I think—a superintendent should be a pretty scholarly kind of person who does read, who does think—getting them prepared to do that for the rest of their career. How much, you know, you need to read and study things, and I think maybe spending more time on getting superintendents to bring prospective superintendents to really enhance their communication skills, to really enhance their presentation skills. Getting them very comfortable being in the public under pressure, typically

and in our community. In my community relations course, dealing with the local newspaper was part of that. And in a [Northern Piedmont] County you know... they're pretty important. You know in in [Urban NC Piedmont City] you've got so much more because of the social media aspect and stuff like that; but, I think getting superintendents to be really much more comfortable dealing with the general public and communicating in a press environment. And, I personally think superintendents should be modeling that, the necessary technology skills. And I think superintendents should be active in social media and that kind of thing. And set an expectation, and set a set of standards of what takes place in a district 'cause I think that's—that's in my opinion, that's not going to go away, it's going to only become more and more mainstream, you know? And so being able to be really strong advocates for all kids and the importance of equity. So, looking at that you know, and being an advocate for equity for students, and being able to take the position that our job is to provide an education to school district, it isn't ICE. That's not our job. But, yes, so I think the equity pieces in this, it maintains its significance. It's probably grown because there seems to be some polarizing issues around the equity piece for all kids, that kinds of thing; so, I think it kind of goes back to that original comment around the legal leadership aspect of that ability to fulfill your oath of office that you've taken. I'm not going to do that Mr. So-and-So. I took an oath of office. I'm not going to discriminate. No.

When asked about his opinion regarding what could be done to improve superintendent preparation, Dr. Jimmy Howlett was optimistic. He simply stated, "I think it

can be improved.” Dr. Howlett then offered his other thoughts regarding how best to improve superintendent preparation:

Well, number one, I think creating a superintendent program comparable to NELA—The Northeast Leadership Academy, you know, and the one in Durham. Something like that is the best way I can imagine going. You know, it was chosen as the outstanding principal preparation program in the country last year, and I can tell you, the reason for that is tremendous practitioner involvement and orientation. Students and cohorts, they come together. They talk about issues. They all have a coach. And the coaching part, and I'm a part of that, but the coaching stuff is so incredibly important. And people who are willing to coach for almost nothing...I mean, you got all of these people who love to do it just because they want to. That, I think, is a great model—but it's not perfect—because it's much more situationally oriented...Lots of what-ifs happen, people coming in to explain stuff. I think that's a real plus. Because leadership is situational, and what people need are examples of situations that they may have to work in, and/or have to deal with, and it's just good to be exposed to a lot of that stuff. You know, a lot of times you're thinking, ‘Are you kidding me? This goes on?’ So, I just think that's really important.

Dr. Charles Xavier also explained what he thought could be done to improve superintendent preparation. First, he shared that, “Practicum experience matters at every level.” He stated that this should be based on “good, solid experiences, supervised by someone who understands it well” and is a “mentor-scholar-practitioner.” Next, Dr. Xavier shared that a superintendent preparation program should be “faithful to the standards for professionals” and that the “coursework should be rewritten” to align with these standards.

Interestingly, Charles also added that there should be a focus on “legislative leadership.” He went on to say that, “North Carolina has not done a good job with this for 12 years,” but added the corollary that North Carolina has been “good at attending to the standards, preparation, evaluation, and PD (professional development).” Dr. Xavier stated that he thought these suggestions would be an improvement because “universities need to do a better job.” He further elaborated on the importance of “finding practitioner-scholars that were actively engaged in preparation.” Too, he stated that students in superintendent preparation programs should be “in front of accomplished scholar-practitioners,” but lamented that “what the university rewards sometimes runs contrary to that.”

Summary of Data Analysis

In summary, the qualitative data from this study shows that most of the North Carolina superintendents interviewed felt like they were prepared or even well-prepared for the superintendency. They also were in agreement that the domains of knowledge that are most important are those that focus on the interpersonal and micro-political aspects of the superintendency. Lastly, the North Carolina superintendents that were the focus of this study felt like superintendent preparation could be improved by having a focus on relevant and situational clinical/practicum experiences.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 highlighted the qualitative data and findings as related to the research questions that formed the core of this study. Chapter 5 will focus on interpreting these findings and determining how these might impact practice and future research.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this comparative case study was to examine the perceptions of present and past North Carolina superintendents regarding their preparation for the superintendency.

Three central questions framed the study:

- How do North Carolina school superintendents perceive their overall preparedness for the superintendency, including preparedness by university master's and/or doctoral programs, if they received such education?
- What domains of knowledge do North Carolina superintendents perceive as most (and least) important to the superintendency?
- How could superintendent preparation be improved, and what would be the best method(s) for preparing future superintendents?

This research was intended to reveal implications for school leaders, as well as colleges and universities in regard to practice and future research. This chapter first provides a discussion of similarities and differences of the study's findings, as compared to the available research and literature on preparation programs for school leaders. The chapter then concludes with implications for practice, as well as implications and suggestions for further research.

Discussion

As noted previously in Chapter 2, research regarding the pre-service academic preparation of superintendents, and the adequacy of that preparation, has been mixed; however, there is agreement that superintendent preparation is an important component that

contributes to an array of factors within the overall arena of education. The outstanding differences within the literature seem to be in regard to how that superintendent preparation should be structured, and the opinions of superintendents who have been studied regarding those domains and elements of the superintendency that are most and least important to the work of these upper-echelon school leaders.

This is evidenced when comparing the earliest 1923 study conducted by Strayer, as well as the second and third AASA decennial studies in 1933 and 1950, where the focus of the superintendency was primarily a financial one, with a focus on cost efficacy and efficiency, in addition to capital outlay and the funding of teaching positions (Glass, 2007). Here, and at this time in American life, the most important skill of a superintendent was his ability to run a cost-effective school system, congruent with the expectations of the business sector of the time (Strayer, 1923).

Interestingly, in this modern case study of North Carolina superintendents, the perceived importance of having financial expertise as a district school leader, as well as the emphasis on honing this skill set in preparation programs, has arguably waned. In fact, Dr. Steven Rogers stated that, “Business and finance—that’s the area where I received absolutely no training.” And, Dr. Jimmy Howlett went even further when he said that, “The technical stuff, like budgeting, was a waste of time.” Perhaps this sentiment reveals a perceived level of expertise, in the realm of finance, by modern-day superintendents that was not shared by their predecessors from the 1920s, 1930’s, and 1950’s; this is echoed by the results of the SPEAR survey by Cooper, Fusarelli, and Carella where 97% of superintendents felt that they were proficient in the area of finance. However, financial stressors were still a significant focus of the AASA study as early as 1992; so, it is hard to imagine that this is not a concern

for superintendents, although it is important to note that this may be a responsibility delegated to an assistant superintendent or other district leader, which could account for this shift in focus and perceived importance.

As Knezevich uncovered in the fifth AASA decennial study, a shift from superintendents being scientific managers to becoming leaders of communities and social scientists began in the 1970s. This AASA study still revealed demographics and the technical work of 741 superintendents, but there was more of a focus on their perceptions regarding minority rights, urbanization, increases in population, and student access to higher education (Knezevich, 1970).

This focus on the role of the superintendent as a social scientist was echoed as essential by Fusarelli and Fusarelli in 2005, suggesting this to be as relevant today, if not more so, than ever. As one of the three “currents” listed, the researchers mentioned that changes must occur in administrative preparation, with a focus on equity and social justice. Specifically, the researchers mentioned that preparation programs must better help superintendents to build civic capacity, value and apply research-based techniques, and be trained to act as social scientists, activists, and advocates (Bjork & Kowalski, 2005).

For this study regarding the perceptions of North Carolina superintendents, the need for preparation programs to train future leaders to be good social scientists was also revealed as one of the ways that preparation programs can be improved. Specifically, Dr. Scott Summers mentioned that future superintendents needed to be taught “...to be really strong advocates of all kids, and the importance of equity.” Therefore, it would appear that this idea of the superintendent as a good social scientist, that first revealed itself in the 1970’s, has persevered through to modern studies as well.

In the sixth decennial study conducted by the AASA in the 1980s, there were no recommendations for professional practice or lists of traits that superintendents were supposed to possess to be successful leaders. However, there was a marked focus on the professional experience of superintendents, the context of the job in which they were working, evaluation, and their opinions on key issues, to name a few. Interestingly, this study in 1982 was also the first real mention of relationships that superintendents were perceived to have with the school board. In 2010, Kowalski, McCord, Petersen et al. also mentioned that superintendents were paying more attention to their school boards by providing orientation for boards and increasing their communication with these critical partners.

This study of North Carolina school leaders also revealed that school board relations is an area where superintendents need additional training and should thus be amongst the foci of preparation programs. While most of the superintendents interviewed for this study listed quite a few domains of knowledge that they considered to be most important, Dr. Jimmy Howlett only listed three, and “school boards” was one of the domains he considered to be most important. Too, Dr. Howlett made mention of the fact that, inevitably, a superintendent will encounter a school board member that will be a “pain in the ass.” Perhaps this is why Dr. Howlett felt that future superintendents need specific preparation regarding school board relations to be prepared for this eventuality. Due to the fact that tensions between superintendents and school boards often exist, it is surprising that more superintendents from this study did not specifically mention school boards in their interviews.

The eighth AASA decennial study conducted in 2000, at the start of the new millennium, was the first study to focus intently on the preparation of superintendents. This

was due, in part, to a need to better understand the impact that licensing was having on preparation and the lives of superintendents (Glass, 2010). Too, this was the first time since the decennial studies had begun in 1923, that the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) had developed standards specifically targeting school leaders and their preparation.

Interestingly, licensure and standards were a topic of conversation in the interviews that were conducted with North Carolina superintendents as a part of this study regarding perceptions of preparedness. Dr. Scott Summers pointed out that, as a North Carolina leader, “We’re in a state where there’re no requirements to be a superintendent.” He mentioned this specifically when asked about what could be done to improve preparation programs for superintendents, alluding to the fact that more guidance in regard to requirements, licensure, and standards could be helpful. Dr. Charles Xavier specifically mentioned standards when he stated that the “coursework needs to be rewritten with standards.” This would lead one to think that perhaps the focus on licensing and standards mentioned in the 2000 AASA study are as relevant in the minds of superintendents today as they were nearly two decades ago.

The findings of Cooper, Fusarelli, and Carella (2000) are also worthy of mention when compared with the responses of the North Carolina superintendents in this study of their perceptions of preparedness for the superintendency. The superintendents they surveyed using the SPEAR instrument were asked to respond regarding the degree to which they felt they were proficient in a multitude of categories associated with the superintendency. In their study, 99% of superintendents rated themselves proficient in Community/Human Relations, 97% considered themselves proficient in Finance and Staff Development, and 92% thought they were proficient in the area of Curriculum Design

(Cooper, Fusarelli, & Carella, 2000). Not as many thought they were proficient in the arenas of Labor Relations (89%), Construction/School Bonds (89%), or Technology (87%). However, the most glaring self-reported deficiency was in the area of Race relations—65% (Cooper, Fusarelli, & Carella, 2000).

As noted earlier, on the whole North Carolina superintendents interviewed as part of this study of superintendent preparation felt that the domain of finance was one of the least important domains of knowledge, one even noting that preparation in this area was “a waste of time.” However, the domain of Human Resources was mentioned by half of the superintendents interviewed as one of the most important domains they could list. Other domains were also listed by all the superintendents interviewed that could be linked to the importance of building community, namely Cultural Context, Climate, Communication, Interpersonal, Micro-political, Environment, Relationships, and even “being seen out,” as was mentioned by Dr. Howlett. Additionally, Dr. Rogers stated that, “I think so much of it; it’s about relationships.” Other than the Relationships domain, Dr. Rogers only listed Curriculum and Teaching as important. Dr. Summers also mentioned that he felt like Teaching & Instruction, Instructional Leadership, and Pedagogy were some of the most important domains. None of the North Carolina superintendents interviewed specifically mentioned construction or school bonds, which could be conflated with their thoughts regarding the realm of finance. However, technology was an area that was listed by Dr. Summers as a domain of importance, adding “social media” as a facet of technology that he felt was worthy of particular mention and an important tool to be utilized by the successful superintendent. Interestingly, none of the superintendents interviewed specifically spoke to any challenges that surround race, perhaps indicating that superintendents are not as

concerned about this arena, or are more comfortable with it, than they were when Cooper, Fusarelli, and Carella utilized the SPEAR instrument in 2000.

When Cooper, Fusarelli, Jackson, and Poster studied superintendent certification in 2002, they indicated that there was a movement afoot to ensure changes were to come regarding this component of superintendent preparation. They pointed out that Ph.D. and Ed.D. programs were the primary vehicles of preparation, that states were driving the university programs (even though the standards were imposed on the universities, not the candidates, as there was no test), and that adequate attention had not been given to the needs of superintendents. One of the most interesting things that these authors pointed out as a result of the study was that there was no central office internship experience necessary for certified superintendents (Cooper, Fusarelli, Jackson, & Poster, 2002).

Additionally, Cooper, et al. addressed some of these same concerns regarding the design of preparation programs for superintendents in 2002. In this study, the researchers examined the theoretical elements of superintendent preparation programs versus the practical pieces of superintendent preparation programs, in what has become a familiar conversation in educational circles. As a result of their research, it was determined that there was a need for preparation programs to provide superintendents with internship experiences that are both relevant and rewarding (Cooper, et al., 2002).

Therefore, it is interesting that all the North Carolina superintendents interviewed as a part of this study of superintendent preparation mentioned at some point in their interview the importance of practical, relevant, clinical, and internship experiences when discussing ways to improve the preparation of superintendents. Dr. Rogers specifically mentioned the importance of coaching and mentoring, stating that training was best had “On the job—with

a background, though,” and noted that the coursework is “secondary to real on the job training... a real clinical experience.” Again, Dr. Summers specifically mentioned North Carolina as a state where there were no requirements to be a superintendent but noted that the relevance of superintendent preparation was critical, even reflecting fondly on a field-based experience that he was provided through his program at East Carolina University, in which he was able to network with members of the North Carolina School Boards Association.

Dr. Howlett noted that a superintendent program needed to be designed where there was “tremendous practitioner involvement and orientation—cohorts, coaching, and situationally-oriented.” “Because, leadership is situational and what people need are examples of situations that they may have to work in, and/or have to deal with, and it’s just good to be exposed to a lot of that stuff,” Dr. Howlett added. Finally, Dr. Xavier mentioned the importance of a practicum experience and being “supervised by someone who understands [the superintendency] well.” Therefore, there would appear to be a need for preparation programs to ensure that a clinical internship, preferably at the central office level, is afforded to superintendent candidates as they are being prepared to be district leaders.

Cooper and Fusarelli noted that in their national survey of superintendents, the vast majority are happy and feel “well prepared” for the superintendency (Cooper & Fusarelli, 2002). These findings echo those of AASA’s decennial studies and are consistent findings in the research.

Most of the North Carolina superintendents that were interviewed for this study of superintendent preparation also felt that they were well prepared for the superintendency. Dr. Rogers stated that, “I actually think I was very well prepared for the superintendency.” Dr. Summers said that he felt “fairly well prepared,” but qualified that “I would attribute

90% of that to my leadership experiences versus my formal training.” Dr. Xavier stated that he felt his preparation was ‘remarkably good,’ adding that, “There were a few things that weren’t, but it was the ‘90s.” The only North Carolina superintendent interviewed who could not say he was well prepared was Dr. Howlett, who stated that “I’d give it a C. It did not exceed growth, either.” However, it is obvious from the interview responses that most of the North Carolina superintendents who participated in this study echoed the responses of the participants that Cooper and Fusarelli studied in 2002 and felt prepared for the superintendency.

The most recent AASA decennial study of superintendents, conducted in 2010 by Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, et al., focused on superintendent preparation unlike any of the prior decennial studies. These researchers also found that superintendents felt prepared, with 80% reporting good or excellent preparation. This AASA study also gathered data regarding the number of superintendents with doctoral degrees, finding that the percentage of superintendents with doctoral degrees had increased 43% from 1993 to 2003, but had not increased in the time that had elapsed since (Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, et al., 2010). Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, et al. also asked superintendents which coursework they felt was the most useful and least useful, finding that law, finance, and public relations were considered most useful, and diversity, research, and tests & measurement were considered least useful.

As established earlier, 75% of the North Carolina superintendents interviewed felt like they were well prepared, very close to the 80% who felt the same way in the 2010 AASA study (Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, et al., 2010). Also, it is worthy of mention that all of the North Carolina superintendents interviewed for this study received doctoral degrees

before they began their work as superintendents; however, most of those were received between the 1993 and 2003 timeline described earlier (Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, et al., 2010). And, again, although finance was determined to be the second-most important course by those superintendents who were the subject of the 2010 decennial study, this was not the case for the North Carolina superintendents interviewed for this study.

However, law was the first domain of knowledge mentioned by Dr. Summers in the interview with this North Carolina superintendent, and law was considered to be the most important course by superintendents who participated in the 2010 study. However, it might be most noteworthy that public relations was the third-most important course for those who participated in the 2010 study, and that all the North Carolina superintendents mentioned the importance of the micro-political and interpersonal domains, and the importance of building relationships with the public. Interestingly, none of the North Carolina superintendents interviewed for this study mentioned diversity, research, or tests and measurement in their lists of what they felt were the least important domains.

Implications for Practice

As a result of this study of North Carolina superintendents and their perceptions of preparedness for the superintendency, as well as the findings of the literature and research regarding superintendent preparation, a discussion of potential implications for present and future practice is needed. To be sure, there is still much work to be done in a multitude of areas that impact superintendent preparation. And, understandably, the crux of this work will have to take place at the university and school district level.

First, it would appear that the course selections chosen by university preparation programs are important to the overall design. Interestingly, this study of North Carolina

superintendents found that some disciplines and areas of study, such as finance, are not considered to be as critical to the job of superintendent as might have first been thought. For example, it might be more appropriate to have doctoral-level coursework such as Collaborating with School Boards, The Role of Technology (& Social Media) in School Leadership, Social Justice & Advocacy; and The Political Science of North Carolina Schools (Unit 1: NCDPI; Unit 2: The North Carolina State Legislature, etc.). In this model, courses could be more individualized toward the specific skill sets and needs of superintendents and communities. If these courses were designed for doctoral-level study and research, some of the other courses that school leaders need, such as finance and law, could be the focus of master's level courses instead.

According to this study of superintendent preparation, as well as the accompanying literature, an internship component should be a hallmark element of any exceptional preparation program for superintendents. All the superintendents interviewed spoke to the need for an authentic, practical, and clinical experience as a future superintendent. Specifically, there is a need for central office internships to be made available to future leaders in superintendent preparation programs. In this way, the authentic, real, and relevant experiences that superintendents crave can be provided as part of their training. Perhaps, with this suggested clinical experience, a model exemplary program should be dubbed SUPA (Superintendents' Understudy & Preparatory Academy). The SUPA internship should consist of a full-time, district-level internship, paid for by the state at the participant's current salary rate. The SUPA internship should encompass the summer months as well, to ensure that the participants are getting the complete view of the superintendency, and all it encompasses, from an up-close-and-personal perspective. Finally, and in addition to the full-

time internship, the superintendent interns participating in the SUPA program should be paired with a district-level coach from an outside school district, to further provide an opportunity for a robust clinical experience.

A cohort model is also ideal, as the shared ideas and relationships of future leaders are potentially strengthened as a result of collaboration between the superintendent candidates. Cohorts might better ensure the maintenance of professional relationships and networks and allow superintendents easier access to other leaders who are researching, practicing, and utilizing best practices in the management of schools and school systems. In this way, a cohort structure could lead to more frequent and longitudinal communication over time, again providing a wider net of colleagues, especially in the cohort area, that could bring districts together toward mutual success over time.

Finally, collaboration between universities and districts to strategically plan preparation programs, internship opportunities, and pipelines to “grow their own” leaders” appears critical to the development of excellent superintendent preparation programs. It would seem to be essential that school districts participate, in what appears to be a necessary partnership, in order to develop superintendents that have received excellent preparation for the superintendency. School districts must be willing to collaborate with universities, trust and share in this new or renewed partnership with the university as a community stakeholder, and be willing to participate in research and be an active research partner with the university community in order to improve superintendent preparation and practice. If this could be done, it is possible that this increased collaboration between university and schools would lead to more work/study programs and lab-school models that would result in better-prepared superintendents.

Implications for Policy

It would also appear that there is a need for policy development in better meeting the preparation needs of superintendents in North Carolina and beyond. Again, these policies must be developed at the university and school-district level, as both are partners in the overall equation of success. Although the university is in control of the curricula provided to future school leaders through superintendent preparation programs, the school districts are largely in control of allowing access to district experiences that can provide the authentic, relevant, and real leadership learning that is so desired by superintendents.

At the university level, policies must be developed to ensure that the curriculum that is offered to future superintendents is holistic, specific to needs, and balanced in its focus on the theoretical versus the practical applications of school and district leadership. A focus on the academic tracks available to school leaders, and how they interlock at the master's and doctoral levels, appears critical to the design of a successful program. Too, policy is needed that focuses on the specifics of funding an exemplary superintendent preparation program, in order to provide the necessary experiences, quality professors and coaches, and fiscal flexibility for candidates to experience the program as designed, and for overall success.

During this study, the superintendents that were interviewed mentioned those domains of knowledge that they felt were most and least important, and when this information is compared against the body of literature that addresses the preparation of superintendents, there are important lessons to be learned that have an impact on policy. First, it would appear that school leadership programs at the master's and doctoral level need to be streamlined, so that the master's track is a prerequisite to the doctoral progression. This would allow school leaders to experience and learn about school finance and law, among

other more foundational arenas related to school leadership, without having to repeat those courses again at the doctoral level. In this way, future leaders could still be exposed to coursework that, despite the opinions of some, is still critical in the eyes of others. This would allow for a focus on doctoral coursework that is more critical to an understanding of the superintendency and make available professors and time for courses that are more individualized to the needs of the superintendent versus the principal or school-level leader. Policies enacted at the university level could make these wanted changes in coursework a reality for superintendents and preparation programs of the future.

Funding also needs to be made available via policy at the university level to ensure that superintendent preparation programs are allowing future school leaders to experience a rich education in the academic, as well as clinical, aspects of the work. At a minimum, funding has to be available for university programs to adequately staff school leadership preparation programs with the necessary array of tenured faculty, with varying areas of invaluable expertise and experience, as well as the other staff needed to manage the day-to-day organization of such a program. If university preparation programs are to be of high quality, the experience and quality of the university faculty must be commensurate; this comes with a price tag that changes in policy might help to resolve.

The policies that are enacted at the school district level are also an important facet of this conversation on improving preparation programs for superintendents and school leaders. It must be an expectation of school districts, and school district leaders at the highest levels, that a partnership at the university level is critical to the longitudinal success of future leaders, staff, and students. The clinical experiences that are so sought after by superintendents and other school leaders must occur in the labs that are our schools and

central offices. This means that district- and state-level leaders must be willing to open their doors and give of their time to future superintendents, in order to ensure that quality personnel are available to accept the mantle of leadership in the future. Policies at the school district level to address this expectation and necessity would help to formalize the channels of communication and build lasting partnerships with universities that the body of research on school leader preparation, and this study, would indicate are essential to the establishment and maintenance of quality programs and people. Too, it is worthy of mention that, given the response of some of the superintendents interviewed regarding the importance of building a supportive team around a superintendent that possesses many skill-sets, superintendents should be able to hire their own senior cabinet members to assist them in best leading a school district.

There is a financial impetus on the school district to enact policy to ensure that the funding is available to further support this development of future school leaders, especially within those districts. Providing funding to secure paid, clinical, internship experiences and residencies to future superintendents is critical to the success of any exemplary superintendent preparation program. When paid internships at the central office level are made available, future school leaders can gain a wealth of real experiences, via extended time spent with mentors and coaches in the district, to better understand the work. This also allows for the establishment of stronger relationships between central office staff and the leaders that they will likely be working with in the not-so-distant future. Too, a high-quality internship experience cannot be achieved while at the same time working as a full-time principal or assistant principal; this is not feasible. Therefore, it would appear that there is a need for additional policy at the school district level to ensure that funding is made available

to secure paid internship experiences at the central office level for those are committed to the rigors of preparing to be the next district leader or superintendent.

Implications for Research

As a result of this study of superintendent preparedness, it would seem appropriate that future research be conducted regarding the preparation of superintendents. There appears to be a need for more qualitative research regarding this phenomenon, in North Carolina and nationwide, to continue to gather the rich responses of superintendents through interviews about preparation. There needs to be more quantitative research dedicated to large-scale surveys of superintendents state- and nation-wide to gather different and additional data of this phenomenon.

The large AASA surveys and studies that have been conducted in the past (especially the most recent AASA decennial study in 2010) would be a good template for such research. Although there is very rich data to be gathered via qualitative methods, large quantitative studies could provide a better overview regarding the status of superintendent preparation in the United States, as well as each individual state, in addition to demographic information and data regarding where superintendents received their university training. These studies might provide more “bread crumbs” regarding where we go from here in our quest for excellent superintendent preparation programs.

In addition, further qualitative research focused on the perceptions of superintendents regarding their preparation for the superintendency can only bring more value to the field and better inform universities and school districts regarding this important piece of the educational puzzle. Additional studies also need to be conducted in North Carolina, as only a small sampling of superintendents was interviewed for this particular study but provided such

rich information and shared experiences regarding their own preparation. In fact, qualitative studies like this one, centered around the three geographic regions in North Carolina—the Mountains, the Piedmont, and the Coastal Plain—could be informative to reveal regional commonalities and differences in the way that superintendents perceive their preparedness for the superintendency. Centering the research on superintendents' preparedness by the various universities in North Carolina (North Carolina State University versus The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill versus East Carolina University, etc.) might reveal interesting patterns and trends that would allow for further curricular analysis and recognition of best practices to be adopted by all. Additionally, future research should sample more recent graduates of superintendent preparation programs, to explore how temporal proximity might impact perceptions of preparedness. Last, but certainly not least, female superintendents should also be sampled and studied to determine the effects of gender on preparation and perceptions of preparedness for the superintendency.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the arena of superintendent preparation continues to be an interesting area of study. The literature and research regarding superintendent preparation certainly indicates that there is still much work to be done in creating exceptional superintendent preparation programs, but there certainly appear to be trends in regard to how to make these programs better. The information gleaned from this qualitative study of the perceptions of North Carolina superintendents regarding their perceptions of preparedness for the superintendency in many ways echoed the prior research in this facet of the educational field. There appears to be a call for some degree of curricular reform, a renewed emphasis on the clinical aspects of preparation (including internships), and a new commitment to increased

collaboration between the universities that are preparing our future leaders and the school districts in which these leaders do and will serve.

The superintendents interviewed for this study perceived some coursework to be more critical to developing an understanding of the superintendency. Although there was a marked pattern in the emphasis the North Carolina superintendents interviewed placed on those courses dedicated to serving the community, and the development of relationships and human resources, other courses, such as law, were considered a “waste of time” by some participants. This might be best addressed by ensuring that programs of study devoted to school leadership address these more basic understandings at the master’s level, and more intense coursework designed specifically to grow superintendents, and teach them to better understand the communities they will serve, at the Ed.D. echelon of study. Too, it is worthy of mention that it was surprising that the domains encompassing technology, social media, and public relations were not perceived to be more important than some of the other domains that were mentioned with greater frequency, nor was there a discernable emphasis on entrepreneurship or innovation in the responses of the superintendents that participated in this study.

There must be an increased focus on internships and the type (and quality) of clinical experiences to which future superintendents are exposed. Future superintendents must spend time in a central office setting, shadowing district-leader mentors, to better understand how this tier of school leadership affects whole school districts and the greater community. This will require a renewed effort on the part of school districts and universities to ensure that Ed.D. students are offered this component of a master practitioner’s path.

It is fitting that one of the most critical approaches to potentially solving the quandaries associated with better superintendent preparation programs is as elemental as universities and school districts better collaborating. For, it is these two institutions that will have the most experience interacting with future leaders, and ultimately selecting, for good or ill, who our future superintendents will be. As a career educator, I hope that the right persons are prepared and selected to lead our school districts in North Carolina. They have a windy road ahead of them, and they need all the support they can get from every stakeholder in the process.

It is also the author's hope that perhaps this research will inspire others to further investigate this interesting phenomenon of superintendent preparation. There is still much work to be done, and a great many ways still to approach this topic to glean untapped and rich information that is beneficial for practice, policy, and future research. As a career educator, I learned a great deal from just having the opportunity to speak with some of the best leaders in the history of North Carolina schools, and I encourage and challenge other educators and researchers to conduct further quantitative and qualitative research on the perceptions of superintendents regarding their preparation for the superintendency.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol

Interviewee (Title / Name):

Institution:

Interviewer:

Jonathan S. Dixon

Survey Section Used:

- A: Background Information
- B: Perceptions of Preparedness
- C: Domains of Knowledge
- D: Ideas for Improvement
- E: Methodologies
- F: Post-Interview Comments/Observations

Other Topics Discussed:

Artifacts/Documents Obtained:

Post-Interview Comments / Leads:

Superintendent Interview:

Introductory Protocol

To facilitate my note taking, I would like to record audio of our conversation today. Please sign the release form. For your information, only researchers on the project will be privy to the audio data, which will be eventually destroyed after they are transcribed. In addition, you must sign a form devised to meet our human subject requirements. Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm. Thank you for agreeing to participate. I have planned this interview to last no longer than one hour. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning.

Introduction

You have been selected to speak with me today because you have been identified as someone who has a great deal to share about the superintendency. My research project as a whole focuses on the preparation of superintendents, with particular interest in understanding how superintendents perceive their preparation for the superintendency. My study does not aim to evaluate your techniques. Rather, I am trying to learn more about your preparation for the superintendency, and hopefully learn about ways to improve preparation programs for the future.

A. Interviewee Background Information

How long have you been...

_____ in education?

_____ at this institution?

_____ in administration?

_____ a superintendent?

_____ in your present position?

Interesting background information on interviewee:

What is your highest degree?

Where did you receive your degree(s)?

B. Perception of Preparedness

- Overall, how well do you feel you were prepared for the superintendency?

Probe(s): Why? What factors contributed to this preparedness (or lack

thereof)?

C. Domains of Knowledge

- What domains of knowledge do you perceive as most important to the superintendency?

Researcher's Note: Define "domains of knowledge," if needed.

Probe(s): Why? What domains of knowledge are least important?

D. Ideas for Improvement

- How could superintendent preparation be improved?
-

Probe(s): Why do you think this would be an improvement?

E. Methodologies for Preparing Superintendents

- What would be the best method(s) for preparing superintendents?
-

Probe(s): Why? Should any methods be avoided?

F. Post-Interview Comments/Observations

- Which North Carolina superintendent do you think I should interview next, to gain even more insight into superintendent preparation?
-

Probe(s): Is there anything else you would like to add to our conversation?

Date: _____

Time Start: _____

Time Ended: _____