SUPERINTENDENTS' ADVICE SEEKING AND RELATED BEHAVIOR IN THE AGE OF STRATEGIC REFORM

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To the love of my life, Catherine, incredibly inspiring and supportive

and

To my loving parents, Mac and Sallie Hall, exceptional educators and role models

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INTRODUCTION

> Advice -- even the advice of distinguished persons, let alone nobodies like ourselves -- is generally judged by results, not intentions.
>
> Marcus Tullius Cicero, 49 B.C. (E.O. Winstedt, Trans. 1913, p. 207)

The strategic impact of advice seeking has been evidenced in distant as well as recent history. Hebraic texts recount how the ancient people of Israel split into two kingdoms because of King Rehoboam's choice to follow the counsel of one group of advisers over another. In present times, although a thorough historical examination has yet to emerge, details are coming to light indicating President Bush's decision to go to war in Iraq was preceded by a conflict between two top advisers. In the end the Vice President held more sway than the Secretary of State and so the President moved to launch combat operations (Bob Woodward provides an insider look in State of Denial (2006) and Plan of Attack (2004)).

In business schools and elsewhere, case studies abound about the impact of advice givers on strategic decisions (e.g. Bay of Pigs invasion; Challenger space shuttle disaster; etc.). Still, for the many examples about advice-seeking behavior and intuitions about the importance of choosing good advisors, there is very little quantitative research about advice seeking or about how such leader activity affects the health and growth of organizations.

The lack of literature about superintendents' advice-seeking behavior is particularly problematic in the current era of school reform that contextualizes the public

education enterprise in America. The reform movement has been growing for the better part of four decades, but the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLBA) created a performance-driven change environment unlike any other in the history of public education. These federal mandates set accountability standards in teacher qualification and student academic proficiency and provide for penalties affecting funding and governance if goals are unmet.

The NCLBA requires that any *new* teacher must meet the criteria for being "highly qualified" -- they have to hold at least a bachelors degree and have passed a state test of subject knowledge. Elementary school teachers must demonstrate knowledge of teaching math and reading. Teachers in higher grades must demonstrate knowledge of the subject they teach or have majored in that subject. *Other* teachers had until 2005-2006 to obtain at least a bachelor's degree, licensure and or certification (NCLBA of 2001, 2002, Section 1119).

Additionally, by the 2013-2014 school year, the NCLBA requires all children to be proficient (performing at grade level) on state testing. Beginning in the fall of 2002, districts began reporting scores for statewide testing. In 2005, schools were required to test all children in grades 3-8 every year in math and reading, and in fall 2007, science assessments were required. Not only do schools as a whole have to show proficiency, but each of four subgroups (children with disabilities, limited English ability, racial minorities and children from low-income families) have to show proficiency, too. Each year, schools must show Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) toward the goal of achieving proficiency in math, reading and science by all children by the 2013-2014 deadline (Section 1116).

Importantly, failure by Title 1 schools to meet an AYP goal…*two consecutive years*…can result in districts having to offer students the option of transferring to non-failing schools; …*three consecutive years*…can force school systems to offer supplemental services such as tutoring, after-school programs and summer school; … *four consecutive years*…may result in the firing of responsible school staff or implementation of a new curriculum; …*five consecutive years*…could lead to replacing the principal and staff, or hiring of a private firm to run the school or a change to a charter school governance. If all options are exercised unsuccessfully, the state will take over management of the school (ibid.).

The stakes for schools and for our country are high. Yet although this federal legislation requires specific system-wide or strategic changes to improve student achievement, it leaves the actual formulation of a solution to local school districts -- and that responsibility falls primarily on the shoulders of the school superintendent. Social science research indicates unique situations or ill-structured problems -- like those involved in strategic decision making -- cause individuals to seek the opinions of others in order to reduce uncertainty about proposed solutions. Because the district superintendent is the central decision maker in a school system, his or her advice seeking related to the NCLBA and similar reforms figures to shape strategically the performance of schools. Consequently, this area of superintendent behavior deserves a critical look.

Whom do superintendents seek for strategic advice?

The superintendency is not a monolithic institution, but collectively this group of

chief executives is in a position to powerfully shape our nation by their decision-making behaviors. Across America the local public school system can be among the largest if not the most sizable of all enterprises in the community:

> It usually serves more meals than the largest restaurant chain in any community. It has one of the largest systems of transportation. Its construction operations may exceed in scale those of any other local enterprise. Its payroll is larger and more complicated than that of most businesses in the community. (Educational Policies Commission, 1965, p. 5)

The truth of this description can be found also in the statistical depiction of the American public school system as a whole.

Combined, U.S. public schools employ about 6.2 million teachers and staff (Snyder & Dillow, 2010, Table 83, p. 122), and superintendents direct a public education enterprise of about 99,000 elementary and secondary schools that enroll about 49.3 million students (Table 86, p. 125). Meanwhile, in 2008 they managed about $585 billion in revenues (Zhou, 2010, Table 1, p. 6) and oversaw total expenditures that topped $596 billion in (Table 8, p. 16).

By comparison, for the fiscal year ending January 31, 2008, retail giant Wal-Mart generated $375 billion in revenues while employing 2 million workers in 7,262 stores across the world (Wal-Mart, 2008, pp. 12, 56).

Furthermore, nationally the impact of our public schools can be viewed not only in economic terms but also in context of the important contributions the public education system makes in shaping the social and political vitality of our country. Writing about the history of the federal role in education, Rentner (1999) observed, “Our national economic productivity depends on the existence of a broad base of citizens with solid literacy and work skills, as well as an adequate supply of highly-educated people who can be

managers, leaders or innovators" (p. 9). She added, "A nation of economically prosperous citizens is also more likely to be politically and socially stable" (ibid.). Yet, despite the high stakes related to the performance of our schools, relatively little research is focused on the superintendency (Crowson, 1987; 1988).

Glass (1993a) noted that in recent years the American superintendency has become a "focal point for numerous studies" (1993a, p. 20) but also pointed out there are "still many gaps in the emerging body of research" (p. 21). He described the research deficiency as a "pressing need" adding, "It is not likely that America's schools can restructure, reorganize, and revitalize the educational process in the absence of clear executive leadership given by the superintendency" (1993b, p. 38). Hord specifically identified a "critical lack" of research about superintendents that "relates to student outcomes" (1993, p. 5).Meanwhile, Kowalski (1995) described this body of research as centered on "situational variables" and "personal variables" that provide "fragmented information" and not "comprehensive understandings of practice" by superintendents (p.4). Thomas said that research on superintendent effectiveness "remains sparse and leaves much to be desired" and that studies on the role of superintendents "offer vague suggestions of effective leadership characteristics and have not linked leadership styles to district or student performance" (as quoted in Pardini & Lewis, 2003, p. 5).

This research deficit is troubling given the current "climate of education reform" identified by Glass (1993b, p. 38) and described by Guthrie (2001) as "a new era in which academic achievement has moved to the center of what is publicly expected of schools" (p. 46).

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 epitomizes the reform expectations that have developed. Although this sweeping and most recent federal contribution to education reform "builds on the accountability and assessment requirements [of] its predecessor, the 1994 Elementary and Secondary Education Act," the high stakes and systemic nature of the NCLBA requirements largely are without precedent in education (Christie, Fulton & Wanker, 2004, p. iv). These mandates are so unique to education that essentially there are no specific cases in other professional fields that could adequately serve to inform superintendents how to proceed. Finally, the NCLBA does not provide a blueprint for how to achieve reform, but gives a timeline and goals combined with incentives/disincentives to force school systems to implement reform.

So whom do superintendents seek for advice in making decisions to comply with these strategic reforms?

What do superintendents do?

Time-on-activity studies provide some general insights into superintendents' activities and relationships with boards, peers, subordinates and the community, but are inconclusive about how such interactions influence strategic decision making.

Mintzberg (1973) conducted a structured observation (one week each) of five chief executives of organizations including: a major consulting company, a research and development firm for industry and defense, a large urban hospital, a consumer goods producer in a competitive industry, and a large suburban school system. Mintzberg found these leaders were oriented toward verbal communications, spending 72 percent of their

day in face-to-face contact and another 6 percent on the telephone (p. 39). His study further showed these top managers worked in environments characterized by brevity, variety and fragmentation of the work activity:

-- Half of all observed activity took less than nine minutes to complete and only 10 percent lasted more than an hour (p. 33).

-- They communicated with three groups -- subordinates (48 percent by time); outsiders (44 percent, inclusive of peers, 16 percent); and directors or trustees (7 percent) (p. 45).

-- Leaders moved from contact to contact, "… almost every one dealing with a distinct issue" (p. 31).

However, Mintzberg emphasized that any appearance of disjointedness belied how each of the five leaders played the central role in sense making for their respective organizations: "In effect, he stands between subordinates and the others, linking them in a variety of ways" (p. 44). These leaders were in a near continuous cycle of direct discussions, and they were the major influence on the exchange of information for their respective organizations.

Particularly pertinent to the present study, Mintzberg observed that these five chief executives devoted 21 percent of their work time in decision-making activities, including strategy development (13 percent) and negotiation (8 percent) (Table 13, p. 251). He also perceived "strategy was usually developed with subordinates" but "the manager, not the group, tended to make the major decisions" (p. 257). He noted, too, the managers' strategy activity seemed to integrate with many of their other activities (ibid.).

In effect, the sum of multiple, seemingly unrelated activities served as the vehicle for implementation of the superintendents' leadership intent.

Notably, Mintzberg described strategy making in the barest sense, simply explaining the activity as significant (p. 99), interrelated (p. 153), and important organizationally (p. 256). Examples were shared in general terms such as "a key decision … to solve a particular problem" and the handling of "a severe conflict between two subordinates" and "[sales] target-setting" (p. 257). Contextually, he indicated these types of decisions were large-scale but it was not clear such were strategic.

Much like a vector, a strategic decision is defined by both magnitude (system-wide) and direction (a deliberate course of action either to remain the same or to effect a change such as reform). Moreover, although strategic objectives may be reached by the collective achievement of short-term and more confined tactical goals, strategic decisions by design have a long-range rather than immediate effect. A strategy goes hand-in-hand with strategic decision making in that it is the means by which leaders synchronize actions and decisions across responsibility boundaries within an organization in order to implement a strategic decision. In other words, a strategic decision shapes individual and small group behavior at all levels throughout the entity. (Distilled from *Joint Publication 5-0, Joint Operation Planning*, http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/new_pubs/jp5_0.pdf).

Mintzberg's methodology raises issues of how well his findings might generalize to all chief executives. Was a week sufficient time to gather adequate information? Did the timeframe include representative routines and relationships for each subject in the study? Was each subject representative of other chief executives in his or her field? Furthermore, the school superintendent's behavior diverged in some important ways from

his cohorts; so it is not clear Mintzberg's summary of findings for the group generalizes well among education executives.

Identified as Manager E, this school district administrator spent considerably more work time in decision-making activities (27 percent) except for the chief executive of the defense research and development firm (60 percent). The consulting head, hospital administrator and consumer goods executive spent only 8, 2 and 8 percent, respectively, of their work time in similar activity (Table 13, p. 251). Notably, the school chief spent much less time with peers (1.3 percent) than his colleagues (12, 19, 3 and 16.2 percent, respectively) and much more time with board members than the rest of the group spent with their trustees/directors (17 versus 5, 2, 10 and 0 percent) (ibid.).

But Mintzberg's study served as an effective launching point for looking specifically at the superintendency through time-on-activity analysis.

Time studies about superintendents at work have confirmed superintendents -- like CEOs of firms -- operate as information brokers in their respective districts (Morris, 1979; Duignan, 1980; Larson et al., 1981; Pitner & Ogawa, 1981). This research also adds insights about these executives' decision-making activity. All four studies focused only on school district administrators, but each differed somewhat from the others in their respective approaches, and there were ranges in behavior similar to what Minztberg experienced with his five subjects -- but across the various studies.

Subjects included school executives in Canada (Duignan, 1980) and the U.S. (Morris, 1979; Pitner & Ogawa, 1981; Larson et al., 1981). Methodologies varied from structured observation (Duignan, 1980) to unstructured observation (Larson et al., 1981) to self-reporting via time card at random intervals (Morris, 1979) to a collaboration that

included direct observation (to give structure and content of superintendents' work) combined with interviews using open-ended questions (to allow superintendents to attach meaning to their activities) (Pitner & Ogawa, 1981).

Sample sizes were mixed, ranging from as small as 3 subjects for each of two observational studies by Pitner (part of the collaborative report with Ogawa) to as large as 20 interviewees in Ogawa's research (his contribution to the same collaborative effort). The other studies involved 6, 8 and 12 participants respectively (Larson et al., 1981, 1981; Duignan, 1980; Morris, 1979).

The length of observation was one week for Morris, Pitner & Ogawa, and Duignan. Larson and his two colleagues used three one-week periods, one each in the fall, winter, and spring.

Larson et al. (1981) also differed from the other studies in the number of raters employed, using four who rotated daily as a check of rater reliability; the other studies used a single rater. Unlike the other studies, Larson and his research associates used an unstructured methodology, recording all activity and developing common categories during analysis, not prior.

The descriptive information from these research efforts largely agreed with Mintzberg's depiction of senior executives' daily experience. The school chiefs' day was described as highly verbal, comprising numerous short-duration, seemingly unrelated contacts and the superintendent acted as a sort of information mediator, synthesizing information in order to manage meaning for the organization.

Additionally, Duignan as well as Pitner and Ogawa found decision making to be a major activity for chief executives of school systems. The former found his subjects spent

about 30 percent of their verbal contact time in planning and problem solving related to system operations and school programming, and another 10 percent for conflict resolution (1980, p. 16). The latter determined the superintendents in his study used 21 percent of their contact time making decisions (1981, p. 54) -- but Pitner with Russell (1986) explained this activity as cluttered with “numerous unimportant decisions” (p. 16). Larson et al. (1981) found decision making (strategy and negotiation) “took only 10% of … contact time” for their subjects (1981, p.18). Morris did not break out decision making as a category of activity.

None of the studies stated whether the strategy development and decision making were strategic in nature, and nothing in any of them indicated a system-wide reform effort like the NCLBA was at stake.

All four research efforts tracked with whom these chief district administrators spent their contact time. Each study included three common groups of particular interest: superiors (23.3, 9.7, 6 and 3.9 percent, respectively); peers [or non-organization contacts] (1.2 percent, 25.7, 17 and 13 percent); and subordinates (56.9, 64.5, 49 and 46.2 percent) -- (Duignan, 1980, Figure 2, p.16; Morris, 1979, Figure 6, p. 22; Pitner & Ogawa, 1981, Table 3, p.53; Larson et al., 1981, p. 17). The range of findings among the four studies might be explained by the short duration of each, the small sample sizes, as well as differing timeframes that set the context for each sample of participants [Morris' superintendents provided input from a summer schedule (1979, p. 21)].

Even with the differences reported across these studies, it is clear superintendents spent considerable time with subordinates and had less contact with peers or school board members. However, the differences do not necessarily reflect a priority in advice seeking.

Pitner and Ogawa (1981) found their subjects were selective in choosing with whom they would interact among the different stakeholder groups. Whether meeting with a subordinate, peer or superior, superintendents likely were to engage with elites such as the highest positioned subordinates and the president of their boards (pp. 57, 61).

Pitner and Ogawa further concluded superintendents use every contact opportunity to shape their school districts in the fashion of their personal and professional preferences, stating, "…leaders not only structure and elicit followers' activities … but also work closely with external elements to legitimate these organizational activities and outcomes" (p. 61). This could reveal something unique about the strategic decision-making behavior of superintendents -- if instead of seeking authentic input from external elements, they use contact time with peers, professional organizations and board members merely to validate a previously held position.

In summary, the four studies revealed contact patterns, but none was clear about who influences the strategic decisions of superintendents.

Superintendents and school boards

> Judgments about decision making are extremely difficult because each instance of administrative behavior is an intricate mix of complex variables. But in general, comments from superintendents…support the belief that most decisions are made in a political frame.
>
> Theodore J. Kowalski (1995, p. 71).

Respondents to the most recent decade study by the American Association of School Administrators reported a mix of superintendents' opinions regarding school boards. But in general a picture emerges of political practicality that superintendents'

success and failure is less a factor of achieving objective criteria in the classroom and more of maintaining harmony with the board and community. Therefore, superintendents' dealings with boards seem to have less to do with seeking counsel from them and more to do with smoothing the way for plans and policies that superintendents already have formed.

Only half of the superintendents who completed the survey reported having a formal job description (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000, Table 5.11, p.60,) and of those administrators, just under 44 percent were evaluated against the set criteria (Table 5.12). Yet, superintendents must be aware of board expectations. Over 91 percent of respondents reported being evaluated by their boards as either excellent or good (Table 5.16, p.62) and more than 95 percent of those polled also rated themselves as very successful or successful (Table 5.25, p. 69). Still, about 15 percent said they left their last superintendency because of conflict with board members and another 10 percent pegged their departures to board elections (Table 5.28, p. 71).

Not surprisingly, results show superintendents view boards as an important source of information. More than 91 percent described boards as "very great" and "considerable" in their value as information sources (Table 5.34, p. 73), but "62.1 percent of superintendents spend three or fewer hours per week communicating directly with board members," spending the greater part of that time with the chair, "leaving very little time for other board members" (p. 65).

Hord and Estes (1993) described it as a matter of a superintendent's keeping peace in order to move forward without board members interfering with the superintendent's plans: "The superintendent has to try and understand where members

are coming from and help them to be successful in realizing their agenda, so the superintendent in turn can be successful in achieving the district's agenda" (p. 77).

This attitude of self-survival or self-perpetuation becomes clear when, despite reporting high ratings from their boards, and identifying boards as sources of important information, superintendents negatively described board members' motivations and expertise. Over 34 percent of superintendents characterized their boards as either dominated by elite individuals, or by those representing a distinct faction or by members who are not active at all (Glass et al., 2000, Table 5.10, p. 59). Moreover, nearly thirty percent labeled their boards as either "not qualified" or "incompetent" (Table 5.9, p. 58). Neither of these opinions leaves the impression that superintendents value school board members as advisers for dealing with a novel or ill-defined situation that strategic decisions typically involve.

Superintendents compared to CEOs

Similarities in role and function that allow generalizing across fields among CEOs also offer to allow generalizing insights about CEOs' behaviors to school superintendents. The school superintendent, much like the chief executive officer, is responsible for the operation of the entire organization, including leading a large work force, overseeing multiple facilities, managing a large budget and reporting to a governing board. Even in the present context of educational reform and the growing expectation that superintendents should serve as instructional leaders (Bridges, 1982;

Cuban, 1984, 1998; Bjork, 1993; Bredeson, 1996), management remains a fundamental activity of district administrators:

> Issues such as budgeting, facility development, transportation, and control of pupil conduct remain highly visible aspects of public education. Most states continue to require a substantial amount of graduate study in management-related areas of school administration, reflecting both the expectations of the public and the realties [sic] of operating a complex public institution. (Kowalski, 1999, p. 198)

Superintendents and CEOs share similarities in the brevity, variety and fragmentation of their work activity (Mintzberg, 1973; Morris, 1979; Duignan, 1980; Pitner & Ogawa, 1981, Larson et al., 1981). Furthermore, although the aims of business and education are disparate, like superintendents, CEOs integrate the wide array of tasks and contacts of their routine to influence the company in a direction of the CEOs preference (Chandler, 1962; Mintzberg, 1973; Quinn, 1980; Galbraith & Karanjian, 1986). Moreover, generally it has been accepted that superintendents share the "major dimensions of administrator behavior" with their executive counterparts in industry and government (Halpin, 1967, p. 27), and so it has been presumed that to the extent similarities exist between education and other institutional fields, educational research should examine findings about other chief executive groups that are "equally applicable" to the behavior of superintendents (ibid.).

However, Glass (2006) believes "the superintendent's role is an anomaly in comparison to many complex organizations." He argues that large private sector firms operate in a sphere where "the roles of leadership (executive) and management are discrete functions" handled by "separate role incumbents" in the organization. Whereas he feels only about "1% to 2% of American public school districts" operate in this

manner (p. 2). By his criteria, comparisons with CEOs would be limited to superintendents whose districts enroll 25,000 students or more (about 248 systems).

To be sure, the 14,190 U.S. school districts (reporting enrollment of at least one student) do not compose a homogenous institution (McDowell & Sietsema, 2005, Table 6, p. xxix). In fact, the variability is evident in the fact that the mean enrollment per school system amounts to 3,339, but the standard deviation is 15,017 students (ibid.).

Consider that students in the city of Washington, D.C. total about 77,000, roughly comparable to the enrollment for the whole state of Wyoming, which reports 85,000 students in public elementary and secondary schools (Sable & Hill, 2006, Table 1, pp. 9-10). Yet, even within Wyoming there are noticeable differences district to district, ranging in size from 2 districts each with 10,000 to 24,999 students all the way down to 3 districts with fewer than 150 students respectively (McDowell & Sietsema, 2005, Table 5, pp. xxvii - xxviii).

Summative information across the U.S. further contextualizes the variability among districts:

-- Only 26 districts enrolled 100,000 or more students. However, while these largest districts represent less than 1 percent of all school systems, they educated nearly 11 percent of all students (Hoffman, 2007, p. 2).

-- On the other extreme, over 7 percent (1,031) of regular school districts were very small (defined as having fewer than 100 enrolled) and these served less than two-tenths of one percent of students (ibid.).

-- About 7,500 rural districts compose the greatest number of regular school districts and serve 17.4 percent of students. Suburban districts number close to 3,550 and

enroll 44.1 percent of all American school children. Meanwhile, 731 systems are classified as city locales, and 28.6 percent of students attend these schools (ibid.).

Yet, despite such differences in size, and apparent complexity, recent surveys show "superintendents in large, medium, and small school districts consider their jobs similar to those held by CEOs in the private sector" (Hoyle, Bjork, Collier & Glass, 2005, p. ix) and that superintendents are concerned about the lack of training in areas related to their CEO role. Importantly, Glass and Franceschini (2007) reported that the two areas of professional development superintendents cited as the greatest need were "*strategic planning* (39.1 percent) and *systemic thinking* (45.4 percent)" (p. 53).

In effect, superintendents seem to be signaling a shift in role emphasis apparently driven by strategic imperatives, and they see their reshaped responsibilities as similar in nature to CEOs'.

Such views about similarity in role complexity are in line with strong public expectations for reform -- expectations that have intensified during the nearly three decades since the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983).

Carter and Cunningham (1997) describe this age of reform as the fourth stage of changing roles for superintendents -- from "clerical" ("assisting the school board with day-to-day details of school activities") to "master educator" ("providing direction on curricular and instructional matters") to "expert manager" (controlling and directing "bonds, buses, budgets, and buildings") (pp. 23-24). In context of "leadership, political savvy, reform, community responsiveness, and improved education," they view the superintendent's role

as having been elevated now to “professional adviser to the board, leader of reforms, manager of resources, and communicator to the public” (ibid.).

Essentially there is a strong sense among superintendents and field observers that the role has shifted away from simply superintending programs and resources and has grown into something much more dynamic and complex -- the transforming of public schools -- and hence the role comparisons that have been made between education administrators and CEOs.

Whom do CEOs seek for strategic advice?

One of the most obvious advice resources for a corporate chief executive is the company’s board of directors. In theory, the board should be a natural starting point for corporate chiefs to seek information and counsel because, although board members are selected for a number of reasons, typically, expertise is a top consideration. Relationships between chief executives and their directors depend on the dynamics of personal and situational factors. But in general, corporate boards serve to hire and fire executives, set compensation packages, oversee company business and to serve as a sounding board on matters related to strategic change (American Law Institute, cited in Finkelstein & Hambrick, 1996, p. 229). These board powers balance the powers of the CEO, and the related literature predominately addresses the tensions resulting from this power relationship and underscores the complexity of the CEO/board affiliation.

Discussing CEO leadership development and the control of managerial opportunism, Shen (2003) said political competition among inside directors (senior

management executives in the firm) imperils the job security of the CEO:

> … [S]cholars following a political perspective of organizations have proposed that senior executives often compete with each other for the CEO position because of the material benefits as well as the prestige associated with it (Lazear, 1989; Pfeffer, 1981). In a longitudinal study Ocasio (1994) reported that, under conditions of economic adversity, the risk of CEO turnover increases when the board has a high proportion of inside directors. (p. 472)

In this situation, seeking strategic advice from the board presents vulnerabilities -- the CEO cannot be sure of the intent of advice from inside directors yet ignoring them sets up a power struggle that could derail any initiative.

Shen also discusses the other extreme -- a CEO who has gained such significant expert power (with the board and other stakeholders) that he may gain the chairmanship of the board or at least the influence over director selection: "Taking advantage of this reduced board vigilance and increased discretion, the CEO may try to strengthen his or her power by selecting directors who are sympathetic to management or passive in governance (Westphal and Zajac, 1995; Zajac & Westphal, 1996)," (Shen, 2003, p. 468). Logically, a company head likely would not seek substantive input from his directors if he intentionally set up a situation like this. His motivation for placing friendly members on the board was to eclipse their input in the first place.

Finkelstein and Hambrick (1996) examined executives' decision-making behavior in terms of how the individual identified options and made choices among alternatives. They also set forth a number of propositions about possible power relationships that can exist between chief executives and their boards (pp. 209-262), and they documented what has been proposed by others about various direct and indirect impacts of boards on strategy formation (Table 7-2, pp. 242-3). Finkelstein and Hambrick found in part that an executive's approach to a choice shaped her or his field of vision, contributed to selective

perception and interpretation of information, and ultimately was the determining factor in making a strategic decision. Additionally, in a review of the literature about what boards of directors actually do, Finkelstein and Hambrick concluded, “The virtually uniform conclusion that comes out of this research stream is that boards of directors are not involved in strategy formation,” (p. 228).

Clearly, boards have formal advice and consent roles intended to allow them to contribute to the shaping of the strategic direction of the organization. But it is equally certain the dynamics of the CEO/board power relationship influence the CEO away from the board as an advice source for matters related to strategic change.

If not company directors, whom do CEOs consult?

McDonald and Westphal (2003) looked at the informal advice networks (those outside the institution’s structure) that influence chief executives seeking input on the strategic direction of their firms. Using social psychology about human motivation they theorized that chief executives would seek advice from others who were similar to themselves in functional background or who were personal friends or who were in the same industry. They further hypothesized that if an executive had a strong tendency for seeking advice from similar others he would be less likely to change his preference for the strategic direction of the organization.

McDonald and Westphal proposed that business chiefs attempt to reduce uncertainty about their decision-making (i.e. they try to maintain the status quo) by employing a strategy of confiding with friends, or, with top managers having similar

functional backgrounds or serving in similar industries. Presumably, those in like industries as well as those with comparable functional backgrounds, respectively, would look at situations similarly (because of shared experiences and assumptions about appropriate strategic action) and confirm the focal CEO's plan as the way they would do it; friends likely would hold comparable opinions and affirm the focal CEO and not contradict his leadership. In other words, in this situation it is likely that the focal CEO is seeking validation of a previously held position and is not looking for objective input that might challenge his or her previously held propositions.

McDonald and Westphal collected data on 241 CEOs of firms listed in the Forbes index of the largest industrial and service firms (p. 10). Assessing general advice-seeking propensities, the researchers asked these CEOs:

> (1) how many times they had sought advice on strategic issues from a top manager at another company during the past twelve months; (2) to what extent they had sought the opinion of a top manager at another company about the firm's current strategy during that that period; and (3) to what extent they had solicited advice from a top manager at another company about the firm's strategic options. (p. 11)

Using product and geographic diversification as indicators of strategic change, McDonald and Westphal found a negative association with seeking advice from similar others and a positive association with seeking advice from non-similar others. That is, firms whose CEOs sought out similar others and friends did not change their strategic direction. The CEOs who sought out dissimilar others or acquaintances did effect strategic change.

Their findings had particularly negative implications for poorly performing firms.

In their analysis, McDonald and Westphal uncovered that chief executives of poorly performing firms had a propensity for seeking advice from similar others

(executives with like functional backgrounds or from same industries, or who identified themselves as friends). Testing for subsequent performance, they determined that "advice seeking from friends and similar others generally has negative effects on subsequent firm performance (lagged by three or four years) … while advice seeking from acquaintances and dissimilar others generally has positive effects on these variables" (p. 22). Put another way, "the results show poorly performing firms are less likely to improve and more likely to get worse" (ibid.). Because of their CEOs' tendencies about whom to consult, these companies' strategic inertia caught them in a negative spiral of declining performance toward demise.

What does this research imply for education?

McDonald's and Westphal's findings about CEOs should raise concerns about the implications for the chief executives of our schools -- especially in the current performance-driven environment of the public elementary and secondary education system.

Practically speaking, there is no choice as to whether a school can choose to enact NCLBA reforms or not. Failure to meet NCLBA objectives threatens a school district's federal revenues. States and local governments contributed about 49 and 43 percent, respectively, of the total revenue for public elementary and secondary schools in 2001-2002 (Cohen & Johnson, 2004, p. 1) and these proportions have remained fairly stable since, amounting to 43.5, 48.2 and 8.2 percent, respectively for local, state and federal funding in Fiscal Year 2008 (Zhou, 2010, Table 1, p. 6). Although federal contributions

are dwarfed by state and local monies, the loss of any of the approximate eight percent of funding from the U.S. government could be crippling for a school system, hampering their already difficult education task. And the potential for peril presently looms.

In 2004, the National Conference of State Legislatures released an assessment of schools that showed "students at more than 27,500 schools nationwide, almost 31 percent of all U.S. public schools, are failing at math and reading" (Almond, "Schools expect flood of lawsuits," 2004). NCSL subsequently reported that only 22 percent of schools were failing one year later, with some analysts suggesting that the change was due to "bureaucratic changes rather than academic gains" and predicting that the number will grow in the next year as "target levels jump" (Paulson, 2004, p.1). Regardless, nearly a quarter of public schools were found ailing and the standards are increasing each year until 2014 when the NCLB calls for 100 percent of students to achieve proficient scores on state reading, math and science tests (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 2002, Part A., Subpart 1, Sec. 1111, (b)(2)(f)).

Since then there have been similar signs of escalating failure. For example, when schools opened in 2007: more than 1,000 of California's 9,500 schools "were branded chronic failures;" Florida had 441 schools that were "candidates for closing;" "some 49 schools in Baltimore alone [had] fallen short of achievement targets for more than five years or more;" and, 77 schools in the state of New York "were candidates for restructuring" (Schemo, 2007, p. 1). In all, about 2,300 schools were placed in mandatory restructuring (Asimov, 2008, p. B1). One year later, the number of schools under mandatory restructuring climbed to 3,500 -- a 50 percent increase (ibid.). For 2008-09 about one-third of U.S. public schools did not make adequate yearly progress (AYP)

under the No Child Left Behind Act -- in a majority of the states (34 plus the District of Columbia) at least one-fourth of the public schools did not make AYP; and in ten of these states (including D.C.) at least half the schools did not make AYP (Dietz, 2010, p. 1).

Even with the oversight of the state and federal governments, the decentralized structure of our school systems places a great deal of autonomy, which equates to enormous decision-making powers, in the hands of local authorities (Resnick & Seamon, 1999). School boards are corporate bodies specifically designated to implement legislative policy and locally administrate a state's system of schools -- states retain legal responsibility but school boards exercise operational control of local systems. However, these boards comprise lay people who are expected to give community oversight while relying on "professionals within the school system … for designing and executing the education program" (p. 3).

In general, Americans see the local school superintendent as the official who "more than any other single person in the community, influences the shape of public education" (Educational Policies Commission, 1965, p. 1). As the central leadership figure -- someone across school lines expected to embody the community's values about education -- the superintendent is expected to build a sense of unity in purpose and to make decisions that set the direction of schools and so shape the lives of a community's children. Thus the superintendent walks a tightrope tensioned between his effort to pull together the many stakeholders and the pull back she or he experiences from the competitive desires that divide stakeholders who seek to gain shares of limited resources and influence the agenda for the schools.

Importantly, this chief executive of the local school system is the "one member of

the organization" who is "formally charged with responsibility for the organization's accomplishment" (Halpin, 1967, p. 34). So it is important to examine key behaviors of this group of decision-makers, and recent information about other chief executives indicates that strategic advice seeking by superintendents should be investigated for the potential impact on the performance of U.S. schools.

Likewise, trends in advice-seeking behavior hold the potential for significantly shaping the face of the superintendency, and so merit investigation on that basis.

Superintendents increasingly are experiencing extreme pressures to produce immediate results and the profession easily could move toward an environment akin to college coaching where the most recent won-loss record is what secures a coach's job and not necessarily the long term prospects for a program. This could be potentially harmful given the unique reform environment superintendents face because of the NCLBA -- especially in view of the fact that in business it typically takes 3 to 4 years for strategic changes to take effect (McDonald & Westphal, 2003, p. 22).

Women and ethnic minority superintendents would seem particularly vulnerable if superintendents are susceptible to the same kind of negative CEO advice-seeking behavior McDonald and Westphal discovered. Already, highly qualified women and minority candidates have been excluded from leading school districts (Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999) and underrepresentation of these groups "weakens" the superintendency (Glass, 2001, p. 4).

According to a report about the 2006 survey by the American Association of School Administrators, only about 22 percent of superintendents are women, although they compose about 75 percent of public elementary and secondary school teachers

(Glass & Franceschini, 2007, p. 63). A similar gap appears in racial compositions: about 6 percent of superintendents claim an ethnic identity (p. xix) compared to about a third of all Americans (U.S. Census, 2006).

Although making grounds in suburban school districts (Glass & Franceschini, 2007), women and ethnic minorities have enjoyed their greatest access to the top executive position in school systems at the two extremes of size -- small rural systems and large urban districts (Glass, 1993b; Brunner, 1999; Kowalski, 1999, Tallerico, 1999; Council of the great city Schools, 2000; Glass et al., 2000). But large urban districts and small rural ones already present challenging contexts for improving school performance, and NCLBA reforms appear to further complicate the educational mission in these settings. Small rural districts lack resources to implement mandates. Urban school districts "serve more than a third of the nation's public school children" and these same systems account for "a majority of No Child Left Behind's (NCLB) 'failing' schools" (Glass, 2006, p. 2). So, women and ethnic minorities face potentially higher failure rates and rates of firing (related to strategic reform).

Given the low number of female and minority incumbents, the loss of a single professional from either of these groups would slow any movement to correct diversity disparities in the superintendency. Aside from the obvious numerical loss, there is a downstream consideration. Female and minority mentors in top positions are needed to attract and guide other females and minorities to advance in education administration.

Finally, about superintendents, decision making in general and advice seeking in particular are poorly understood, but even less is known about the effects of isolation in decision making. Data show that superintendents report belonging to various professional

groups (75.9 percent, AASA; 63.2 percent, state professional organizations, 41.3 percent, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (Glass et al., 2000, p. 49)). But superintendents may belong to one or more of these associations, or none, so it is not possible to determine how many are isolated (by choice, or, circumstances having no, or no significant, contact with fellow superintendents) and there have been no studies about the effects of this condition upon decision making or subsequent school performance.

Armstrong (1989) found 29 percent of a sample population of superintendents in Washington (state) were totally isolated, and inclusive of this subset, over half had no significant network interaction (p. 89). But in his study about superintendents in Illinois, Broderick (1996) found only about two percent of his sample had only one or no professional contacts (p. 68).

Does previous time-on-activity research hold?

Study into advice-seeking behavior in context of the strategic reform environment should also include at least some examination of whether previous research about superintendent activity has changed. It has been nearly 3 decades since seminal time-on-activity studies were completed -- research that generally shapes perceptions today about what superintendents do. Given the apparent shift in complexities a superintendent faces, have superintendents seen a similar shift in the nature of their day-to-day activities from 30 years ago? If so, what has changed? If not, how have superintendents coped with the additional focus on strategic matters? Has federal reform legislation in fact become more of a factor in what superintendents do?

Glass (2006) contends that professional development programs need to focus more on a management imperative, and he has created a hierarchy of management essentials that should be taught superintendents based on the size of a school district and the attending realities of structural constraints.

Certainly, superintendents of large urban districts enjoy the advantage of hiring staff for handling separately the discrete functions of management and leadership. But is *how* the central office is structured the best determinant of whether a superintendent is performing like a CEO?

Superintendents of small- and medium-sized school systems lack the luxury of creating distinct positions for handling leadership responsibilities (i.e. “influencing,” “guiding” and “persuading” (Glass, 2006, p. 5)) and management functions (i.e. “fiscal, budget, facilities, personnel, curriculum, and support services” (ibid.)). Yet, they seem to be saying that despite their having to perform more of the day-to-day management of programs, personnel and property -- because of a small central office staff -- they still face expectations to be visionary and transformational -- strategic -- in their leadership.

Superintendents have indicated in the past that there are some differences in behavior due to district size.

On average, superintendents of large urban districts communicate more directly with boards. Nearly 78 percent spend 4 hours or more a week speaking with board members compared to about 62 percent of all superintendents who spend 3 hours or less (Glass et al., 2000, pp. 65-66). This disparity likely is a consequence of the “fractious political relations” found in larger districts and so the greater need to talk probably is driven by greater involvement in policy-making by these superintendents’ boards (Hoyle,

Bjork, Collier, & Glass, 2005, p. 51). District size and setting combine to cause differences in the frequency that rural and urban superintendents visit their schools (Buchanan, 2004, p. 37) and may shape whether a superintendent believes it is possible to succeed or not (Fuller, et al., 2003, p. 12).

Size and setting cause unique difficulties, but these factors also contribute to some similar results for large and small districts' efforts to attract and retain superintendents (Carter & Cunningham, 1997, p. 6). Glass (2001) reported that urban superintendents rotate as frequently as every 2.3 years (p. 3) and Czaja and Harman (1999) found that the greatest number of superintendents in Texas who changed jobs (either for another superintendent slot, or for some other type of work) departed from small and rural districts (p. 5). Both rural and urban superintendents report feeling isolated, with geography influencing the former (Armstrong, 1990) and the demands of the job shaping the latter (Fuller et al., 2003).

District size even influences whether a superintendent believes that implementation of NCLBA reforms is possible or not.

In a nationwide survey, Farkas, Johnson and Duffett (2003) found superintendents of small school districts were about twice as likely (41 v. 22 percent) as those of large districts to state that NCLBA "probably won't work." Conversely, leaders of small school districts were less likely (28 to 43 percent) than leaders of large districts to think NCLBA will raise standards (p. 27).

However, while size and setting contribute to differences in superintendent *activity* and *attitude*, it appears that NCLBA mandates have created an environment of reform that applies uniformly across all school systems regardless of size or setting. The

net result is superintendents as a practical matter now share a common *role* with CEOs of complex organizations -- that of transformational leader -- and superintendents of all sizes and settings of schools equally face the challenges of developing and implementing measures of strategic change.

Finally, in the last decade the U.S. has experienced a phenomenal shift in how we exchange information in particular with regards to accessibility. Technology almost drives individuals to be more instantaneous in their communications. In our society, citizens no longer seem patient enough to write a letter and wait for a response. Instead, answers are expected nearly instantaneously.

Cell phones and personal digital assistant (PDA) devices now make superintendents always on demand -- and it would be reasonable to assume that how and how often they communicate with constituents may have changed. How have text messaging, e-mail, and cell phone usage altered superintendent behavior?

Glass (2001) reported that a high number of superintendents complained about having "too many insignificant, yet time-consuming demands placed on this time" that limit their ability to be effective (p. 2). How does the constant availability afforded by instant communication contribute to this problem?

Research purpose and design

> Generalizations decay. At one time a conclusion describes the existing situation well, at a later time it accounts for rather little variance, and ultimately it is valid only as history.
>
> Lee J. Cronbach (1975, p. 122)

Clearly there is a convergence of factors that indicate the role and function of the superintendent has become more strategically focused and that the emphasis of this shift from manager to transformational leader is on implementing reforms that improve classroom processes and results. Given the findings about strategic advice-seeking tendencies among CEOs and the impact on organizational success, the implications for education beg for an investigation into the strategic decision making behavior of superintendents. Moreover, the lack of a defined research emphasis in this area of education means that a series of seminal studies are needed in order to simply lay a foundation for future work.

The present study is an exploratory attempt -- hopefully among other studies either underway or that will follow -- to establish an origin or baseline for inquiry into this promising field of research. The design uses field observations about a group of superintendents' daily routines combined with interviews using open-ended questions -- giving both an etic and emic view of (1) advice seeking of superintendents who participated and (2) the strategic nature of the work among this group. The design provides descriptive information about the nature of superintendents' work, but importantly includes a qualitative narrative informed by both the researcher and the subjects. Instead of addressing hypotheses, the research is guided by questions (see section below), developing a collective account from practicing superintendents rather than making inferences from statistical analysis of quantitative data.

The choice of this approach is rooted in the literature.

Correlational and experimental designs are ideal for measuring and comparing normative behavior of a sample within a population (Sprinthall, Schmutte & Sirois, 1991;

Babbie, 1998; Jaeger, 1993). In that regard, Cronbach (1975) agrees that correlational research "by sampling from a population of persons, or a domain of situations" allows observers to generalize (p. 124). However, he contends that "it does not carry us far in the study of interactions" (ibid.). He further argues that in the case of complex interactions, it is best to study a "practice or proposition" in the context of the situation (ibid.).

Even on a prima facie basis, "complex interactions" is a form-fitting description of the present state of affairs for school superintendents in the U.S. -- a milieu of factors anchored in a reform environment defined by strategic change. Spindler (1988) argues -- in calling for greater use of an ethnological approach for finding answers in research -- that it is these very instances of "vexing educational problems" that call for an *in situ* look at the circumstances surrounding the actors and the action (p. 1). His views align with what Cronbach (1975) says is needed in face of changing situational dynamics: an "open-eyed, open-minded" effort to gain insight "into contemporary relationships" in order to "realign" views with "present realities" (p. 126). Ultimately, Spindler proposes something of an integrated approach among research designs where a qualitative study would provide in-depth knowledge to focus quantitative research -- correlational or experimental -- that would test hypotheses formulated from the qualitative study.

The present circumstances (seeking a starting point instead of generalizing behavior around a set of variables) oblige the use of a "non-standardized treatment" in order to allow informants to define "the problem, the question, the situation" rather than using a research design that looks for answers within a preconceived set of suppositions that test a hypothesis (Dexter, 1970, p. 18-19). More specifically, if the aim is like that of the present study -- to contribute to the formation of a general direction for continuing

research efforts -- Kalvelage and Segal (1976) prescribe “elite interviewing” which involves questioning “a relatively small number of people who have a relatively large amount of information on a particular subject” (p. 32).

Babbie (1998) contends such exploratory work is critical to avoid “the risk of missing some critical elements” (p. 53), and in support of his claim he cites a 1960s research effort he contributed to that examined student radicalism. He said “fifty students who differed in their political orientations were interviewed in-depth. No attempt was made to select a representative sample of students, nor were data collected in a standardized form” (ibid.). Instead, he and his cohorts interviewed the students allowing them to “speak freely about their political views and their attitudes toward student radicalism” (ibid.). But Babbie offers some cautions about exploratory studies, pointing out that this design does not provide “making descriptive assertions about some populations” (p. 51); does not allow “making explanatory assertions about a population” (p. 52); and does not permit testing of hypotheses or answering “basic research questions” (p. 53). However, Babbie argues that an exploratory study is a good design for discovering possibilities for follow up in a “more controlled survey” (ibid.).

Using the elite interview protocol, a common set of questions were used, but every effort was made not to artificially structure the interviews. In other words, the question and answer sessions were built around the stackpole of events observed during the daily routine and expanded to more generally elicit comments about advice seeking related to strategic decision making.

The current state of affairs were mined particularly to discover what is taking place among superintendents with regard to strategic decision making and advice seeking

within the framework of school reform that continues to dominate the public education enterprise. Kalvelage and Segal (1976) propose that in situations when key information largely is "in the minds of relevant officials" the research technique that is the right fit is "elite interviewing" (Table 4, p. 27). Dexter (1970) offers caution in using elite interviews, noting that an interviewer's weak knowledge base or an informant's lack of relevant views will sink the interview. However, he adds that elite interviews are a good fit for exploration if steps are taken to background the interviewer (pp. 11-20).

Secondarily, the study attempts to provide a more current view, albeit through a limited time-on-activity observation schedule, of how superintendents spend their time -- and for the first time do so from a perspective of noting the strategic nature of the superintendent behavior. In describing personality research, J.W. Atkinson points out that any substantial relationship found between variables describes only "the modal personality of a particular society at a particular time in history" (as cited in Cronbach, 1975, p. 122). In the same way, suppositions formed nearly 30 years ago from time-on-activity studies might not now be reflective of the number and types of activities that typify a superintendent's daily routine. Moreover, these seminal works did not place a specific focus on strategic decision making behavior.

When the original studies were completed about three decades ago, the superintendent's schedule was determined to be comprised of a variety of contacts described as brief and fragmented (Duignan, 1980; Morris, 1979; Pitner & Ogawa, 1981; Larson et al., 1981). However, researchers indicated that the numerous seemingly unrelated contacts made during a superintendent's day actually allowed him or her to control information as the mediator of meaning for the school system.

Two decades later, nearly 37 percent of superintendents complained that this formerly utile pattern of contacts placed “too many insignificant, yet time-consuming demands” on their time, thus “limiting their effectiveness” as leaders and administrators (Glass, 2001, p. 4). Moreover, since that time, technology has made the superintendent even more accessible in an environment of increasing complexity created in large part by federally mandated strategic reforms. With greater demands for attention to strategic matters during the last seven years, it is likely the previous catch-as-catch-can leadership approach is inadequate.

Subjects in this study were observed for a single day and their activity documented by type, length, purpose and place. Information relating to personal interactions included the titles and numbers of those involved and the identity of who initiated the contact.

Some inferences were drawn from patterns that emerged, but the subject also was interviewed to provide texture about that day’s observations. This emic perspective makes explicit what Spindler (1988) describes as “implicit or tacit” knowledge possessed only by those native to the situation (p. 7). Such native knowledge serves as a barrier of sorts against researcher bias inadvertently masking “dimensions of the situation and of the person [that] enter into complex interactions” (Cronbach, 1975, p. 116).

Questions not hypotheses

As an exploratory attempt to find a baseline for future research about superintendents and their advice-seeking behavior related to strategic decision making,

the present study does not test hypotheses to amass empirical generalizations, but gathers information and multiple narratives to develop an idiographic explanation that can contribute to the future direction of research about strategic decision making behavior of superintendents.

The investigator used a common set of questions to define the discussion, but largely the subjects steered the conversation. The specific set of questions that guided each interview is provided in Appendix A. However, the broader research questions included the following:

(1) Largely, the literature about superintendent behavior is based on research conducted before passage of the NCLBA, which has become a major force in shaping priorities for school administrators. Moreover, most time-on-activity studies were conducted just prior to publication of *A Nation at Risk* which essentially launched two decades of reform effort leading to federal intervention. Now superintendents face not only expectations to be effective managers of school systems but also to be visionary leaders in making comprehensive reform -- they must be catalysts for cultural, structural and instructional strategic change that boosts classroom performance of students with whom they have little or no direct contact. So, has the ongoing and increasing pressure for meeting targets for school reform altered the role and the function of superintendent, and if so, how?

(2) Even the most basic information about strategic decision making has not yet been studied -- including the very notion of what superintendents define as *strategic*. Outside of the military the term has become common parlance to mean *important.* However military leaders are careful to maintain a clear line of distinction when talking

about *strategic* and *tactical* matters. Strategic weapons are of such magnitude as to deny an enemy the ability to wage war. In the same way the Strategic Petroleum Reserves are maintained to prevent an interruption of our economy that would debilitate our ability to defend our nation and its interests. Do superintendents make similar distinctions – in terms of magnitude and direction -- or is their use of the word *strategic* simply another way for them to convey the concept of *important*?

(3) A large number of superintendents cited *strategic planning* and *systemic thinking* as the greatest needs in professional development (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). Are professional associations and university programs failing to keep up with the changes that practitioners are experiencing in the field? Do superintendents even think to use universities or groups like AASA as resources for responding to strategic change?

(4) In view of the findings by McDonald and Westphal (2003), whom do superintendents consult about strategic matters like NCLBA mandates? Like the poorly performing firms in this referent study, is there a possibility for school districts to experience an ever-tightening negative spiral because leaders seek others who will confirm their beliefs rather than challenge them? Are we seeing that now in the high number of failures among public schools, or at least could it be a contributing factor? In 1990, Gaylord Lasher examined how 65 Montanan superintendents handled new information in making decisions as part of an exercise about school management. He concluded that participants relied on only partial information and even ignored new information that was introduced to indicate great changes in the simulated organizational environment. Is this an indication that superintendents might share the same tendencies displayed by the CEOs of negatively performing firms in the referent study?

(5) How has the new strategic environment impacted what superintendents do and how they do what they do? Is the superintendent's routine still defined by brief contacts that are fragmented into seemingly unrelated interactions and varied but heavily verbal? If there have been changes, what are they and what was the catalyst for change? Do superintendents still tend to meet with the elites of various constituencies? Are contacts still highly verbal or do text messaging or e-mail or both predominate? Previously superintendents used contacts to synthesize information in order to perpetuate plans and priorities. Has this basic nature of contacts changed?

(6) Also, has the commonality of strategic reform created a more universal role and function among superintendents regardless of size and setting of the school system? Frederick Hess completed a study in 1999 in which he found that between 1992 and 1995 "the typical urban district launched at least 12 large-scale reforms" or three per year (2005, p. 42). However, he concluded these efforts were "more of a political distraction than a substantive school-improvement initiative" (ibid.). He said such initiatives were dramatic-sounding changes intended to give the impression of a quick turnaround but that these rarely produced any noticeable large-scale success. He also observed that failures were little-tolerated by boards -- meaning superintendents were replaced -- and that successful superintendents often were lured away. Now that the NCLBA has mandated specific objectives and timetables, are superintendents of large urban schools behaving differently? Do they still attempt 2-3 reforms per year and do these compete with the strategic reforms dictated by NCLBA legislation? How do they compare in this regard to their colleagues in suburban and rural school settings?

(7) Hess also commented that the typical tenure of 3 years for superintendents of urban schools was “certainly not enough time to make a significant and enduring difference in the schools” (2005, p. 42). His observation seems in line with McDonald’s and Westphal’s (2003) common view about strategic change in business -- that it takes about 3 to 4 years for reforms to take effect. So is the superintendency headed the same direction as collegiate coaching, which is more and more shaped by demands for immediate results -- a situation that is detrimental to implementation of long-term strategies?

Organization of the study

This dissertation is organized into five chapters.

The present chapter frames the problem as well as provides the rationale for the research design that was used in the inquiry, and explains the significance of the contributions the study makes to the larger body of educational research. Chapter 2 contains a literature review that uses Chapter 1 as a jumping off point. The introduction already reviews much of the literature relating to the study except for a specific examination of the basics of decision making and the social-psychological factors influencing advice-seeking behavior. Chapter 2 addresses these specific gaps. Chapter 3 details the methodology in terms of specific procedures and protocols. Chapter 4 includes the collected data and narrative that serves as the basis of analysis. Conclusions and recommendations resulting from the study are presented in Chapter 5.

Appendices provide pertinent information relating to the conduct of the study.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

> The human understanding when it has once adopted an opinion (either as being the received opinion or as being agreeable to itself) draws all things else to support and agree with it. And though there be a greater number and weight of instances to be found on the other side, yet these it either neglects and despises, or else by some distinction sets aside and rejects; in order that by this great and pernicious predetermination the authority of its former conclusions may remain inviolate.
>
> Sir Francis Bacon, 1620 (as quoted in Avey, 1921, p. 41)

The previous chapter adequately reviewed much of the literature pertaining to what superintendents do (time-on-activity studies), the relationship between superintendents and school boards, how roles and functions compare between superintendents and business executives, and advice-seeking tendencies among chief executive officers.

This chapter builds on the information in Chapter 1 by providing a general overview of the body of work relating to decision making, expanding the discussion to include the literature about strategic decision making -- and exploring studies about the nature of the individual within strategic decisions -- to arrive at a look at the research into the social-psychological influences that shape a person's choices.

Decision making: General overview

In the most simple of terms, a decision is nothing more than choosing between a known set of alternatives. Yet, decision making is not always that simple, especially in

context of the strategic direction of a company or a school system, and a great deal of literature has been devoted to explain how decisions are made (descriptive, an empirical account of what is the case) or should be made (prescriptive or normative, what ought to be the case). However, the literature builds around key theoretical approaches.

The Rational Model of decision making draws heavily from the scientific management principles of Frederick W. Taylor (1911) and economic theory of the rational man. But while the economic man is expected only to maximize subjective utility, the rational approach to decision making assumes that individuals systematically will analyze a problem and possible solutions.

Herbert Simon (1956) criticized rational models of decision making for ignoring situational and personal constraints, such as time and cognitive capacity. He proposed that individuals used strategies to develop acceptable solutions, not optimal ones, to real-world problems, an idea that he referred to as bounded rationality. This approach particularly applies to non-programmed decisions (novel or poorly defined) as opposed to programmed ones (governed by repetitive, well-defined procedures).

In education, the real world of school administration seems to support Simon's proposition. In a survey of senior high school administrators, the National Association of Secondary School Principals found that the rational model of step-by-step weighing of options did not fit the realities of their hectic daily activities nor the political realities that require negotiation and compromise among competing stakeholders in the local schools (Sharp & Walter, 1997, p. 59).

In organizations, decision making is more complicated because of group processes, especially the possibility of disagreement among influential members or

factions within the organization. Developed during World War II, the management science approach is the organizational analog of the rational approach at the individual level. Based on operations research, statistical and mathematical models are used to find optimal solutions to problems that are analyzable using variables that can be identified and measured (Morris & Kimball, 1951).

The Carnegie Model of decision making is the organizational analog of bounded rationality at the individual level and addresses the political processes of decision making: the role of coalitions and how decisions often are not optimal but merely satisfactory because of the need to build support (Cyert & March, 1963; Simon, 1956, 1976). Based on the realities of decision making, the Carnegie Model considers how competing preferences and values among stakeholders impact the process and outcome of problem solution.

In developing his theory of incrementalism, Henry Mintzberg (1978) added to the notion that organizational decision making was not a deliberative process. Using two cases -- Volkswagen's market response, 1920-1974, and U.S. policy on Vietnam, 1950-1973 -- he discovered patterns, change-continuity cycles, which showed strategy as emerging from the interaction of leadership, environment and bureaucracy. An intended strategy is unrealized, another emerges, and this pattern continues until a strategy is realized, not because of a straight path from *a priori* deliberations but as "ex post facto results" of decisional behavior (p. 945).

The difference between the explanations of the Carnegie Model and Mintzberg's incrementalism is a matter of emphasis; the former focuses on uncertainty relating to problem identification and the latter on uncertainty relating to solution identification. The

Garbage Can Model addresses a third condition: high uncertainty about both the problem and the solution (Cohen, March & Olsen, 1972) -- a condition prevalent in "organized anarchies" characterized by "problematic preferences" (goal ambiguity), "unclear technology" (unclear processes lead to trial-and-error) and "fluid participation" (involvement varies each time) (p. 1). This model was developed as a computer simulation (Fortran) to explain the decision-making context of university departments, described in extremes of uncertainty where a mix of problems and solutions are identified but not necessarily with connections between or among the two elements of the equation. But on its face, it does not generalize well to the centralized strategic decision-making situation of the local school district superintendent.

Victor Vroom and Philip Yetton (1973) developed the Normative Model of decision making to help explain which style of decision making is appropriate for different classes of decisions such as Category I (which parallels Simon's programmed category) and Category II (akin to nonprogrammed) (Harrison, 1987). Five responses frame the Normative Model, and range from autocratic to participatory depending on the importance of the decision and the need to create acceptance by including others in the process: (1) leader takes known information, decides alone; (2) leader gets information from followers, decides alone; (3) leader shares problem with followers individually, listens to ideas and decides alone; (4) leader shares problems with followers as a group, listens to ideas and decides alone; (5) leader shares problems with followers as a group; seeks and accepts consensus agreement.

However, while Vroom and Yetton address inclusion of subordinates in the decision-making process, allowing for the influence of advice seeking in both problem

identification and solution identification, the prescriptive model they offer does not give insights on the actual advice-seeking behavior of decision makers or the how this behavior impacts strategic decisions.

Strategic decision making

Strategic decisions have a magnitude that encompasses the entire organization and are intentionally directional, either affirming the status quo of the present commitment of resources to achieve specific objectives, or, changing measurably the basic orientation of the entity. Modeling the strategic decision process has been difficult given that by nature, strategic decisions involve situations that often are ill-defined and complex. Studying strategic decisions is further complicated by a multilayer nature which confounds measuring the impact of such decisions on both outcomes and throughput processes. Moreover, strategic decision making has grown to include such diverse mechanics as capital budgeting and planning (see Mintzberg, 1994 for an exhaustive treatment). However, some seminal work provides the basic structure for understanding the direction of the research in this field.

Mintzberg, Raisinghani, and Theoret (1976) offered an early multi-phase description of the strategic decision-making process that generally has stood the test of time and continues to serve as the basis for most other modeling efforts. They observed the flow of strategic decisions follows three major phases: (1) identification (recognize opportunities, problems and crisis; clearly identify problems; (2) development (seek alternatives; design new solutions or modify ready-made ones); (3) selection (screen out

infeasible options; evaluate: analyze or bargain to choose an alternative; authorize or commit to the course of action)

Other research has focused on formulating typologies of strategic decision processes.

For instance, David Hickson, Richard Butler, David Cray, Geoffrey Mallory, and David Wilson (1986) developed three categories: fluid (steadily paced through formal channels, timely); constricted (restricted information gathering and member participation); and sporadic (drawn out by interruptions and recycles) (pp. 114-124).

Mintzberg (1994), on the other hand, synthesized strategic decision-making research into ten schools of thought that attempt to explain the process: design (informal process of conceptualization by the leader); planning (formal decision-making about the future); positioning (strategy content); cognitive (how individuals cope in formulating strategy); entrepreneurial (visioning by a strong leader); learning (strategy emerges from collective thought); political (use of power in conflict); cultural (corporate distinctives that shape actions); environmental (passive response to external forces); and configurational (fits the other nine schools into a single process) (pp. 2-4).

Finally, Paul Nutt (2001) offered a typology based on purpose or functional area: reorganizations, control systems, services, technology, marketing, internal operations, personnel, and products (pp. 512-514, 520-524).

While there are many approaches to the study of strategic decision-making, this branch of research closely parallels classic decision-making theory in describing actual behavior. In a nutshell this means that across schools of thought, researchers generally recognize the tension between the idea of rational decision-making like that presented by

Igor Ansoff (1965) and the notion of incrementalism (not small-steps gradualism, but a series of trials, errors and revised trials) as advanced by Charles Lindblom (1959).

Indeed, “synoptic” and “incremental” models “pervade the literature,” and James Fredrickson and Terence Mitchell (1984) state the environment, stable or unstable, dictates the decision-making model (p. 401). To that end, James Dean and Mark Sharfman (1993) found “decisions vary in the degree to which they are made using rational procedures,” with stable environments and well-understood issues eliciting rational behavior (p. 603). Paul Shoemaker (1993) made similar findings, adding the corollary that dynamic circumstances, uncertainty and change, evoke incrementalism and other “coping (and often groping)” responses (p. 121-122).

Regardless of the school of thought, the human element is the critical factor.

Focus on the individual

Kathleen Eisenhardt (1989) found the individual characteristic of executives' advice-seeking preferences affected the speed of forming strategic decisions.

She examined eight microcomputer firms for differences in how quickly companies made strategic decisions in what she described as a “high-velocity environment” (p. 543). Contrary to intuition and typical conclusions about comprehensiveness (a measure of rationality), Eisenhardt found the quantity of alternatives did not affect speed. However, the sequencing of the various considerations was key -- simultaneous assessment of multiple possibilities expedited the decision-making process. Likewise, she concluded that autocratic control (i.e. limited input) was

not necessary to hasten decisions, even in highly uncertain situations. Instead, she found that rapid strategic decisions resulted for firms whose top executives sought advice.

The five "speedy" firms had internal counselors whom the chief executive consulted about strategic decisions. Eisenhardt did not examine the use of external sources. However, the backgrounds of the internal consultants offer some insight to the present study. The five firms included seven advisors (two firms had two apiece): an old friend/co-founder; a past CEO of two companies who previously worked with the CEO; co-founder who previously worked with the CEO; sales executive who previously worked for the CEO; a previous senior general manager at a top firm; a key sales executive for two prominent firms; first line manufacturing manager (Table 5, p. 560). In other words, the CEO's of the five speedy firms sought advice from familiar folks. Moreover, in effect each was an outside expert -- only one was not noted as having been brought in from another company.

Michael Hitt and Beverly Tyler (1991) examined the rational normative (systematic process with defined goals) and external control (stepped responses to environmental changes) models as well as another, strategic choice (personal characteristics or preference orientations of the decision maker), to understand which best explained strategic decision making in corporations. The study focused on mergers as the medium for examining strategic decision making. They found that "a rational analytical approach dominates strategic decision processes" but also that some variance could be explained within industry types suggesting that environmental conditions determined some of the differences (p. 346).

Moreover, Hitt and Tyler concluded "executives matter above and beyond rational analytical processes" and deterministic conditions (ibid.), finding individual characteristics accounted for differences in strategic choices as well. Age, work experience, type of education and level of executive authority contributed statistically significant effects to differences in strategic decision making among the executives selected for the study.

Key to the present study, Hitt and Tyler suggested personal characteristics, may have influenced the results. They offered that hubris (over-confidence from past successes) caused biases that moved executives to overbid in mergers. While stating that results from the study did "not necessarily represent conscious opportunistic behavior," Hitt and Tyler offered that executives can and do act in their own interests out of utility, but still at odds with shareholders' interests. Moreover, they call for additional research to investigate "the potential for individual characteristics to affect strategic evaluations" (p. 346).

Neither Hitt and Tyler, nor Eisenhardt examined the effectiveness of strategic decisions made by their subjects.

Combined, Hitt and Tyler, and Eisenhardt give some dimension to McDonald's and Westphal's discovery about CEOs and strategic decision making: Chief executives use informal advice networks to make strategic decisions, and advisors tend to share similarities in professional experiences or are friends with the top executive -- a process which tends to eliminate uncertainty about the chosen path rather than challenge proposed decisions. What underlie such tendencies -- seeking information that confirms

rather than challenges decision makers' ideas -- are social-psychological processes that shape personal identity and self-esteem.

Social-psychological elements of advice seeking

In 1987 Peter Marsden published the "first survey network data representative of the American population" (p. 122). Using data extracted from the 1985 General Social Survey, he discovered that Americans tend to exchange information about "important matters" [not defined by the survey or respondents] with a small group that is "kin-centered, relatively dense [strength of relationship ties], and homogenous [age, education, race/ethnicity, sex]" (ibid.). Notably, nearly one-fourth of respondents indicated they recently had discussed important matters with no one, or with only one person -- amounting to inadequate or marginal counseling support according to the study.

Marsden's analysis proposes that social identity does not compete with or replace an individual's identity -- unique attributes of personality, physical appearance and personal tastes -- but, instead, serves to reinforce self-perceptions.

During the last three decades, research has developed to explain in part this phenomenon within the concepts of social identity and self-categorization. There already are adequate resources that capably review the bodies of research (e.g. Hogg & Terry, 2001; Haslam, 2000; and Hogg & Terry, 2000). But a brief recap is appropriate.

In short, what emerged essentially from Henri Tajfel's (1972) efforts to explain prejudice and nationalism was a line of work about attitudes and behavior of superiority that develop within groups toward other groups. While Tajfel looked at intergroup

behavior, John Turner (1985) examined intra-group dynamics, specifically identifying a depersonalization that leads to group members to think of themselves as homogenous. Dominic Abrams and Michael Hogg, (1988) continued this line of thought in explaining discrimination in terms of self-esteem, saying essentially that individuals boost their egos by adopting prejudices against others. Abrams and Hogg reasoned, in effect, that self-categorization reduces uncertainty by contributing to the conceptualization of a prototype individual who concretizes for the group particular thoughts, experiences and behaviors.

From such work, the research has been extended to study how groups are used to supply positive self-esteem -- how social identity processes are motivated by "a need to reduce subjective uncertainty about one's perceptions, attitudes, feelings, and behaviors and, ultimately, one's self-concept and place within the social world" (Hogg & Terry, 2000, p. 124).

Using the Prisoner's Dilemma, Kenneth Dion (1973) concluded that because of group membership alone, members could like each other even with -- perceived or real -- extreme differences in personal traits and tastes between individuals.

Even random assignment to a group elicits cohesive behavior that produces discrimination against other groups (Locksley, Ortiz & Hepburn, 1980), and members do not need to interact to prefer each other over outsiders (Turner, 1984).

What is inferred from the combination of these works is the kind of utilitarian behavior described by Eisenhardt, and likewise by Hitt & Tyler. Individuals defer to in-group members "when an in-group is central to their self-definition and a given comparison is meaningful or the outcome [of an action or decision] is contestable" (Haslam, 2000, p. 33).

This in-group reliance when an idea is contestable -- i.e. seeking input from similar others -- was a behavior that McDonald and Westphal (2003) examined in the referent study. They said “people identify more strongly with contextually relevant in-groups when they experience uncertainty about personally relevant issues” (p. 4) and that “an uncertain individual will be especially likely to overstate the extent to which in-group members support his or her views” (p. 6). This fits with the notion about the role self-esteem plays as a factor in advice seeking about strategic matters. People tend to seek greater in-group identity not as a factor of conformity but from a self-serving need to validate attitudes, beliefs AND decisions.

At its core, this social-psychology phenomenon is a product of what the literature describes as confirmation bias.

Confirmation bias

Although there are instances where confirmation bias might be used to describe the deliberate engagement in “building a case to justify a conclusion already drawn,” it is a term used “generally by psychologists” to describe a spontaneous behavior of “unwitting selectivity in the acquisition and use of evidence” (Nickerson 1998, p. 175). In short, it refers to a human tendency to look for information that strengthens an idea one already holds -- at the expense of conducting an authentic search for information regardless of whether it challenges or confirms a previous thought.

In his forensics into three U.S. international political fiascoes, Irving Janis (1982) essentially alludes to a confirmation bias effect in developing his groupthink construct

about group cohesion. In a way, so does Allison (1999) in his post-mortem look through three “lenses” to examine the handling of the Cuban missile crisis. But both men examine how the government acts or at least how an elite group within an administration makes a decision. So their approach is from an organizational view, or, how group processes shape decisions. Confirmation bias could be fostered in the mix of dynamics proposed by Janis and Allison, but the focus of both researchers is on how groups or organizations make or shape decisions -- not on how these contribute to affirming a decision that already was made.

By contrast, the concept of confirmation bias that emerged from the seminal work conducted by Peter Wason (1960) emphasized the individual. He devised a simple brainteaser of three numbers that he told subjects “fit the rule” (e.g. 2, 4, 6). Then he asked them to reason out the nature of the rule by devising their own sets of number triplets -- which they would ask him whether the new set fit the rule also.

The desired answer was that the numbers were in ascending order.

However, participants had difficulty arriving at that answer because most would devise sets of numbers that tested a preconceived notion of the rule. In other words, if they thought the rule for “2,4,6” was that each number increased by “two” then they only tested positive examples of this rule -- for instance the triplet “8,10,12” would be offered to Wason who would confirm this set fit the rule. Few tried to test their hypothesized rule with a set of numbers that could refute the answer they had set in their minds. In the case of “2,4,6” if a student wanted to challenge their notion that the rule was “each subsequent number increases by two,” the set of numbers “2,4,5” would challenge it.

There are some obvious limitations to Wason's seminal study. He used 29 undergraduate students which limits at least in part the generalizability of his findings. Also, the "test" was an abstract task and not a field observation of *in situ* behavior.

But there were some peer concerns about his interpretations as well.

Norman Wetherick (1962) argued that Wason had no way of knowing the subjects' intentions and that this was problematic in understanding if the response was eliminative or enumerative: "Instances may at the same time either conform or not conform to whatever hypothesis the subject has in mind …Wason did not ask his subjects to state whether they thought their instances would be positive or negative …" (p. 246).

In other words, the triplet used to test one rule might also rule out others not obvious to Wason … or for that matter to the subjects. Without knowing their intentions, Wason had no way of discerning if they were eliminating other possible solutions. Using the "2,4,6" example, if a subject responded with "8,10,12" and Wason confirmed that the triplet fit the rule, then rules involving multiples of the first number in the triplet were automatically eliminated without being articulated. In a way, Wetherick was implying that Wason could have been guilty of confirmation bias in his interpretation of the subjects' behaviors -- Wason expected confirmatory behavior and confirmed it by the way he interpreted his subjects' responses.

Wason received Wetherick's criticism by undertaking additional analysis of his own 1960 study (defending that it was adequate for testing "how [subjects] set about trying to discover" a rule (Wason, 1962, p.250)) and combining it with new research to conclude confirmation bias exists and that it develops in individuals "through a long

learning process to seek and expect a simple correspondence between sentences and states of affairs" (1968, p.280).

Essentially, in his follow up experiment, he used another abstract task of inference to test for confirmation bias, asking subjects to determine whether a conditional sentence was true or not. Using the form, "if P then Q," he presented four cards, one each showing a vowel, consonant, even number, and odd number. "The task was to select all those cards, but only those cards, which would have to be turned over in order to discover whether the experimenter was lying in making the conditional sentence" which Wason stated preceding each attempt (p. 273). A second experiment in the same study asked subjects, using a set of cards with different symbology, to "pick out 'the one card which makes the rule false'" and to "pick out any which 'prove the rule true'" (p. 278).

Saying the results were "disquieting" (p. 281) because of the apparent lack of taking into account "the possible and hypothetical by formulating propositions," and questioning whether Piaget's stage development (as pertaining to cognition of formal operations) held true, Wason nonetheless concluded that the introspections he elicited from subjects confirmed his theory about confirmation bias (e.g. "'I feel very unhappy about my original choice, but yes, I would still choose the same ones if I had to do the task again'" (p. 280)).

Over the years others have attributed confirmation bias to other phenomenon (see for example Klayman's and Ha's (1987) arguments in favor of a positive test strategy, or, Farris and Revlin's (1989) case for an explanation by counterfactual strategy) and some have pitched cognitive or attitudinal motivations such as mental overloading or even mental laziness. Fischer, Greitemeyer & Frey, 2008, and Fischer, Schulz-Hardt & Frey,

2008, each give a thorough treatment of these topics. Still, as Nickerson stated, it is a phenomenon generally accepted by psychologists (and commonly used by them) to describe an individual's tendency to migrate toward information and sources that provide positive association with already held ideas.

Moreover, psychology has pursued the concept as an explanation of behavior in such fields as finance, medicine, mental health and politics. Nickerson, 1998, gives an exhaustive review of the literature in this regard to make the case about the "ubiquitous" nature of confirmation bias "in many guises," (p. 175).

Likewise, in the referent study McDonald and Westphal (2003) discussed the concept as a contributor to advice-seeking behavior among the top executives they studied, with CEOs and top managers likely to seek out similar others in terms of functional background (e.g. finance versus operations) or industry type (such as automotive manufacturing, or, pharmaceutical research), as well as friends, who presumably have similar social standing and ties.

In the present study it is reasonable to assume confirmation bias might be a factor in school superintendents' advice seeking as it pertains to strategic decision making.

CHAPTER III

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

> One goal of research is simply to understand a tiny piece of … reality. The insights provided by a simple model can be used to raise new questions for future research
>
> Richard L. Daft (1983, p. 542)

The present study is part replication and part exploration, but in both cases the aim is discovery of new knowledge. The one approach arose from the perspective that there has been a lapse of about 30 years since seminal time-on-activity studies helped describe what superintendents do. The other emerged from the view that superintendents share "major dimensions of administrator behavior" with their executive counterparts in industry and government (Halpin, 1967, p. 27) … which could possibly include the same detrimental CEO strategic decision making behavior discovered by McDonald and Westphal (2003).

On top of these considerations, the superintendency is undergoing churn created by the current climate of mandated reform in public education, which has contributed to a sense of urgency for at least one professional organization to find out the possible impact on administrators -- and so understand a little better the condition of the whole of the public education enterprise.

The AASA periodically has surveyed superintendents for about 90 years with most of the studies undertaken "approximately 10 years" apart (Glass & Franceschini, 2007, p. xi). However, the "rapid rate of change and effects resulting from state

accountability programs and No Child Left Behind legislation" prompted them to conduct a midterm study to find out about probable changes in working conditions as well as the leadership issues and challenges superintendents were facing as a result of increasing nationwide pressures for systems-wide reform.

Importantly for the present study, participants in the AASA survey overwhelmingly identified *strategic planning* and *systemic thinking* as key skill sets that should be taught in the training and development of superintendents (p. 53). Unfortunately the survey did not investigate strategic decision-making behavior, and while different work condition factors were surveyed there was no probing of how this shift in focus impacted what superintendents do.

Yet, just as geologists have certain indicators to narrow their exploration searches to areas with potential of good results, so the present study has markers to guide its efforts.

Within pages 30-39 of this report there is a detailed discussion about the bases for the choice of design structures employed for the present study: *field observation*s combined with *elite interviews*. The following discussion about design and methodology details how both approaches were employed to obtain the data and findings presented in the next chapter.

Subjects

Even an exploratory qualitative research design is developed with the aim of producing a valid sample of subjects to study. Indeed, precisely because the

"interpretivistic" framework of the present study elicited "local knowledge" in order to find common and contrasting meanings in the individual stories of participants (Ospina & Dodge, 2005, p. 143) -- as opposed to the "positivistic research methods" of "hypothesis testing and quantitative data analysis" (DeSanctis as cited in Walsham, 1995, p. 378) -- sample selection was a keenly important factor (if readers are to be convinced about the value of this research as a starting point for defining and expanding inquiry into strategic decision making as a critical behavior of senior school administrators).

While face validity may seem a vague or subjective measure, Daft (1984) suggests it is a logical measure for ensuring "acceptability to common sense," which he contends is the ultimate test of an idea or theory (p. 543). Lacity and Janson (1994) agree, and in fact cite his work to make their point that "common sense" is key to "fellow scholars finding meaning" in research about "contextualized circumstances" which are "not readily amenable to quantification" (p. 149). In the final analysis, they argue that such acceptability ultimately is the measure by which interpretivist research is deemed valid and worthwhile. Given the interpretivistic nature of a large portion of the present research effort -- essentially a triangulation of multiple views expressed during individual interviews -- face validity then holds important value in looking at the methodology of sample selection.

The population sampled in the present study was the body of Tennessee public school superintendents. Collectively this group leads a state school system that has a larger number of high enrollment districts than does the population of superintendents in the U.S. public school system as a whole:

Table 1 School districts by size: U.S. vs. Tennessee

District size	U.S. (n=14,063)	Tennessee (n=136)
Very Large (> 25,000)	*4 %	**10 (7 %)
Large (≥ 3,000 < 25,000)	*31 %	**67 (49 %)
Medium (≥ 300 < 3,000)	*46 %	**59 (43 %)
Small (< 300)	*18 %	**0

*Glass, 2007, p. 5; **calculated using T.O.S.S., 2009

In terms of student performance, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress reports, overall, Tennessee's fourth and eighth graders score just under average for both reading and math compared to the nation (NAEP, 2007). "Within ethnic group" comparisons show Hispanic fourth graders in Tennessee as well fourth and eighth grade Anglos and African Americans performed poorer than their respective groups across the country. However, by the eighth grade, Hispanics in Tennessee did as well in math as their ethnic group nationally, and did better than them in reading.

Still, for the present study, state-nation differences in student performance or in groupings by district size do not present a concern in terms of examining a subset of Tennessee superintendents -- at least not in this attempt to catalyze a broader probe into strategic decision making among school superintendents. However, in future research, such factors might be useful in assessing outcomes of strategic decisions or at least give context to them.

In the fall of 2009 when the present study commenced, there were 136 directors of schools (superintendents) in the state according to data obtained from the Tennessee

Department of Education. All 136 were invited by electronic mail to participate in a "research project about superintendent professional networking and strategic decision making" to help "… launch a new field of inquiry" in education administration. They were told that it was a two-part study that required them to allow an observer to record their work activity for one day and to conduct a brief interview to give some context to the various elements that were observed.

The e-mail was written and distributed under the imprimatur of the Department of Leadership, Policy, and Organizations at Vanderbilt University using a mailing list provided by the Tennessee Department of Education.

During the month that followed, there were 13 replies: three declines, nine acceptances and one request for additional information. An acknowledgement was sent to each, and more particulars were sent in response to the single request for greater details. A second wave of e-mails was sent within five weeks of the first invitation, producing another eight responses: two accepted, two declined and four asked for more information. Each received an acknowledgement, and four received extra facts and context as requested. In the end, 11 agreed to participate. However, one dropped out before scheduling began.

Regarding school district size, representation included 1 district with enrollment equal to or exceeding 25,000 (10 percent of participants, compared to 7 percent of the districts in Tennessee and 4 percent of those in the U.S.); 6 districts having 3,000 up to 25,000 students (60 percent in the sample, 49 percent in TN, 31 percent in the U.S.); 3 districts under 3,000 but with 300 or more enrolled (30 percent, 43 percent, 46 percent) and none with fewer than 300 pupils (0, 0, 18 percent).

The group was fairly representative of Tennessee geographically, with three located westward, three found in the middle of the state and four in the time zone to the east. Such balance appears to add to the rigor of the study, given that other research suggests that geography influences administrator behavior.

In their study of 41 school principals, Martinko and Gardner (1990) found "no significant differences … for managers from different sized districts," however, they found respective links between behavior and "differences in grade level, staff size, geographic location, socio-economic status and relative urbanization" (1990, p. 338). Yet, even with a statistically significant relationship between administrator action and these variables, the two researchers offered that "it is difficult to make predictions" regarding behavior (pp. 337). Nevertheless, their findings indicate that achieving balanced representation is important.

Personal demographics will be presented more specifically in the next chapter. However, regarding gender and ethnicity, the 10-member sample included 2 women and no ethnics. This compares favorably in a simple view of the ratio of women to men superintendents nationally, 22 percent, (Glass & Franceschini, 2007, p. 5) and in the state, 16.9 percent, (calculated using T.O.S.S., 2009). Regarding the lack of ethnic inclusion in the group, nationally, only about 6.2 percent of superintendents claim a racial minority affiliation (Glass & Franceschini, 2007, p. 18), and in Tennessee even fewer superintendents could be identified as such -- 3.7 percent (calculated using T.O.S.S., 2009). Comparing these numbers to the ethnic composition of the populations in Tennessee and the U.S., the lack of ethnic representation among superintendents is obvious: Anglos compose 77 percent and 65 percent respectively of Tennesseeans and

U.S. citizens; African Americans make up 17 percent and 13 percent; while Hispanics are 4 percent and 16 percent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009).

The small sample size is one contributor to the variations noted in ethnic representation and in district size. The fact that Tennessee does not have a single school system with an enrollment of fewer than 300 students is a factor in the lack of spread in district size, too. But another influence on the composition of the sample seems to be selection bias, which theoretically poses a threat both to the internal validity of the research in terms of derived results as well as to the external validity of the research in terms of the generalizability of the findings.

During the course of this study various subjects stated directly or perceptibly that they agreed to participate either because they "remember what it was like to be student working on a dissertation" or that they "had a special respect or friendship" with the professor supervising the study. Some shared that the imprimatur of Vanderbilt University was a strong factor. Then again, given the high attention among superintendents regarding *strategic planning* and *systemic thinking*, it is also possible that some participated simply because of the focus of the study on strategic decision making.

Still, even with the several considerations addressed above, the selected sample seems an adequate group for this study. At this point in what could be an emerging field of inquiry about school administration, the aim of selecting participants was less about creating a statistically defendable sample and more about choosing an appropriate representation … on face value … for establishing a starting point for future qualitative and quantitative studies and hypothesis testing. In essence, the aim was to put together a focus group of sorts. In this sense, an appropriate sample was achieved.

Performing field observations

> Contextualization can usefully extend as far as time and resources permit and often provides the base from which relevant hypotheses can be drawn.
> George Spindler (1982, p. 43)

Scheduling was coordinated with each participant or an assistant.

All participants were offered a range of dates to consider and asked to offer several possibilities that were coordinated by the investigator among all the subjects in order to develop a workable composite schedule for the investigator. In each instance the investigator emphasized that the idea was to schedule a "typical" day without consideration for any of the activities on the calendar -- the only requirement being that the superintendent needed to be working that day in the school system.

Yet, out of the ten, one participant agreed to a date that coincided with a weekly meeting with the central office administrative staff; five had monthly meetings with their executive staff or "elites" from their schools or communities during the observation; and four had school board meetings in the evening.

Later, for each superintendent, the investigator reviewed the respective assistant's calendar to get a sense of how typical the observation date was as far as scheduled agendas; and the meetings were confirmed to have been regularly scheduled in past months. In future studies, multi-day observations should help diffuse or dilute any bias introduced by scheduling.

The observations were direct, unstructured and nonparticipating.

During each visit, the investigator was situated to easily monitor desk work and the movement of the subject in and out of the office. With changes in activity (computer

work, phone calls, texting, etc.), each subject provided copies of materials that were produced or descriptions of the issues that were handled during the preceding activity. Subjects were shadowed on foot when on the move within the district building, and in the same car when the subject traveled off site. The investigator sat in on closed door meetings except when confidentiality was requested; but after each of these instances, the investigator asked the subject to describe in general terms what took place.

Instead of categorizing or coding behavior during the observation period, the investigator kept a running narrative of activities and behaviors. The result was a one-day log or journal that recorded every event and interaction of any length with administrative and executive staff, teachers, parents, board members and students, as well as community members and leaders, even vendors and contractors.

This method of record keeping differs from Mintzberg's original work (1973) in that he coded activity at the same time he recorded it. However, the present study was conducted consistently with Pitner and Ogawa's (1981) method of recording information with "no explicit classification or coding" during the observation in order to create a "narrative record" (p. 9). Coding was completed only after all the observations were done and reviewed for completeness.

As for coding methodology, Mintzberg's 1973 framework for categorizing manager behavior became a popular standard for comparing findings among similar work studies (Pitner & Ogawa, 1981, Larson et al., 1981, and Martinko & Gardner, 1990, present a review of studies to support this claim). However, Larson et al., 1981, took his work a step further and developed a Data Coding Manual (Appendix A, pp. 74-79) to "address operational definition problems" with Mintzberg's system by creating "explicit

coding rules" (p. 14). An example would be the hierarchy they developed for handling situations when "two or more activities take place at the same time" (see "Concurrent Activities," p. 75). Importantly, although they added procedural clarity, Larson et al. (1981) stayed true to Mintzberg's definitions for activities and purposes (1973, pp. 249-257) except to delete "External Board Work" and to add "Other" in the purpose categories (Larson et al., 1981, p. 14).

The researcher in the present study heavily referenced their Exhibit 3, The Mintzberg Classification System (pp. 47-48); Exhibit 5, Event Characteristic Categories (p. 50); and Data Coding Manual (p. 74-79) and these are included in the present report as Appendix B, Appendix C and Appendix D, respectively.

Each event was assigned an activity code and categorized by purpose with the duration noted in whole minutes. For personal contacts, individuals were coded by title, and numbered, and information was recorded about who initiated the interaction and where the activity took place. The ten running narratives were coded individually, then the coded information was combined and collapsed into a single file. The information was processed to produce graphs and tables which allow comparison of "what-superintendents-do" data across studies.

Results are presented in the next chapter.

One of the considerations in designing and performing this field study was the possible influence on subjects' behavior by the mere presence of the investigator. In this case, "observer effects" describe the influence the investigator has on the actions and speech of the subject simply because the subject knows he or she is being watched. One of the most well-known examples of how an observer can contaminate a study is found in

Elton Mayo's work conducted at the Hawthorne Works of the General Electric Company in Chicago between 1924 and 1927 (see Mayo, 1933 and Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1939). In the study a number of factors were manipulated in the workplace to assess the impact on worker output. In the case of lighting, Mayo found that when it was increased, production increased. However, output also increased when lighting was dimmed. Researchers concluded that "people behave differently (usually better) when they know they are being observed" (Lefton, 1994, p. 26).

Care was taken on the phone beforehand, as well as during introductions the day of and throughout the observation, to elicit confidence from subjects in the professionalism, experience and maturity of the investigator; and to put subjects at ease and perhaps lessen the stimulus of simply being in the study. For the observation, particular attention was given to wearing professional attire and having materials ready and organized (notepads, pens, digital timer, digital voice recorder, etc.) to help blend in and to reduce distractions from fumbling for materials or having to ask to borrow an item.

Importantly, the investigator attempted to connect with each subject without creating a social atmosphere for the day.

During introductions, the observer used common talking points each time to briefly describe the research focus and to overview procedures for the day. Likewise, subjects were invited to describe their schedule for that day, briefly giving any context for planned events and the current situation. To engage in the actual observation, the investigator typically would transition by asking "Is this a good place for me to set up shop? I want to be sure to stay out of your way, and please know that any time you need me to excuse myself, just tell me." At that point, the investigator pulled out a pen and pad

and noted the time to denote that the observations had begun.

Sometimes subjects made stops on the way into work. In such cases, the information was noted to include as context for looking at other events throughout the day. But the activity was not included in the data that was collected.

Some after-hours events were observed and others not -- depending on whether there was a time break of more than an hour from the end of the regular work routine and the start of the next activity. After-hour occasions were not included in the data summary, but were noted in order to contextualize behavior for that day.

Also, every effort was made to establish the investigator as a neutral observer.

Questions were kept to a minimum during the observation and were asked in a way so as to avoid inferences that might hint at a value judgment of an action or behavior. Also, inquiries were timed so as to least interrupt the flow of the day. Finally, exchanges typically were ended with a statement like “Thank you for clarifying. I apologize for the interruption” (without being saccharine or a nuisance with the statement itself) and stated with such inflection as to indicate a boundary for the researcher to re-engage as an unobtrusive observer.

Observer effects also can result from biases the observer brings to interpreting the behavior of the subject -- using a personally held perspective rather than the actual context for the situation. Furthermore, an investigator can influence data either by overemphasizing an expected behavior, or failing to notice a behavior that was not anticipated.

Regarding the first, observer effects were addressed by the discipline of the observer in viewing the context for statements and actions primarily *in situ* – using

immediately antecedent information, or by asking the subject to give texture. However, background information on that individual or that school system helped to form clarifying questions when the antecedent was not obvious. For the latter, the time-series documentation process provided some measure of control against over- or under-emphasizing a behavior, numerically at least, by recording every activity and providing a quantifiable basis for how often a behavior occurred.

Importantly, in naturalistic research such as an observational study the investigator serves as what Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe as the instrument of choice. Because of human abilities (responsiveness; adaptability; holistic emphasis; knowledge base expansion; processual immediacy -- on-the-spot processing; opportunities for clarification and summarization; opportunity to explore atypical or idiosyncratic responses), investigators are able to deal with an "indeterminate" situation (p. 193). Whereas inert instruments like surveys or diaries, for instance, cannot sense the dimensions of a situation.

Yet, Lincoln and Guba also stress that trustworthiness of the human instrument is as important as "the trustworthiness of any pencil-and-paper instrument," emphasizing that even the most expert observer is "capable of refinement" (p. 194).

Conducting interviews

> A good interviewer has, obviously, as many of the virtues as possible of a good social scientist, a good reporter, and a good listener.
>
> Lewis Anthony Dexter (1970, p. 60)

As a human instrument, the interviewer is critical in the elite interview process.

Kalvelage and Segal (1976) note that elite interviewing is a personal transaction between the interviewer and the interviewee (p. 32). Consequently, the "personality and the skill of the interviewer" are key to eliciting knowledge from the interviewee "to deal with the issues at hand" (Dexter, 1970, pp.24, 88). High in the order of desirable qualities is adeptness in conversation-making from having "carried out enough interviews" so as to have developed a sense "to think imaginatively about what is being looked for" and a nimbleness in guiding the interviewee to talk about these matters without taking control of the conversation (p. 88). Dexter also contends that the interviewer should be able to "quickly pick up about the background and the situation" which requires that she or he "have enough relevant background" to be sure to make sense out of the conversation, or, be able to observe "so as to learn what is meaningful and significant to ask" (p. 17).

The investigator in the present study has acquired a unique experience level in both strategic decision making and elite interviewing. During the 1990-1991 Gulf War, he served as a politico-military planner in the Strategic Plans and Policy Directorate of The Joint Staff at the Pentagon, advising senior military and civilian officials regarding strategic issues pertaining to national security and foreign policy. Later in his military career, at the U.S. Naval Academy he directed the academic programs for leadership development during which he was afforded the opportunity to interview high level British naval officers to develop leadership case studies about the Falkland Islands conflict between the U.K. and Argentina. Following retirement, he served for more than a decade as the head of a large media outlet for which he interviewed U.S. politicians, religious leaders and entertainment personalities.

Complementing these special skill sets, specific preparations were taken

particularly for this research.

The investigator approached each interview by consulting a number of sources to develop a sense of the issues facing the respective school system and the superintendent. He checked online versions of local newspapers (pre- and post-observation) for information that might be pertinent. Likewise, he reviewed the district website to find tidbits about the recent or soon-to-happen current events that might pertain to any activity noted during the observation or pertinent to the interview regarding strategic decision making. In three cases there were weblogs (or blogs) in which either the leadership of the superintendent was a topic of discussion or in which there was a policy or project issue that appeared keen to the community conversation.

Kalvelage and Segal (1976) advise that a set of questions be prepared to cover the purpose for the interview and to lead to other questions. Appendix A has the list used for this study. However, being mindful of Dexter's caution about "rat-a-tat-tat questioning" (1970, p. 56), the question set was employed more to initiate a discussion than dictate it, and to provide commonality in topic areas for triangulation among the ten subjects. As possible, the dialog was fostered to be "really a quasi-monologue stimulated by understanding comments" (ibid.).

Eight of the interviews were recorded on the same day of the respective observation. The remaining two were conducted and recorded by phone.

Approximately three months later, follow up interviews were conducted by phone with five of the subjects (coordination issues prevented follow up with four, and one subject had not yet completed a first interview). The format was the same as the original interview, allowing the investigator to check for consistency between the two occasions.

All six answered across each of the topic areas, mostly consistent with the respective earlier interview even though there was a three month interval. This conveyed a sense of reliability for this data set. Any substantive deviation is discussed in the interview section for that participant in Chapter 4.

Triangulation of the data focused on three primary areas:

1. What does the superintendent consider to be "strategic" -- how does he or she define strategic decision making?

2. Whom does the superintendent consult regarding strategic decisions – is the subject insular (seeking others "like" him or her, or maybe no one at all) or does he or she pursue authentic input?

3. Has the job of superintending grown in complexity across the board for school systems, regardless of district size -- in terms of a strategic environment, what impact has the era of school reform had on the nature of the superintendency?

In all, this study includes information collected during the course of more than 70 hours of observations during 10 single-day events, and takes in subjects' views expressed during more than 8 hours of interviews.

Other considerations

> Needless to say, all methods, observational research included, entail trade-offs.
>
> Alan L. Sillars (1991, p. 198)

All research comes at a cost in terms of time and money, whether conducted in a lab or in the field. But because field work is conducted away from the in-place resources

of a home base, it creates unique considerations relating to “the collection, transcribing, and coding of interaction records” (ibid.). These factors are reflected in the write-ups of observational work referenced in this report (Mintzberg, 1973; Duignan, 1980; Morris, 1979; Pitner & Ogawa, 1981; Larson, et al., 1981; Martinko & Gardner, 1990) and were in play for the present effort:

-- Six of the one-day events involved an overnight stay and in one case, two nights of lodging were needed.

-- Gas and food expenses were nominal in three cases, because each was within a reasonable drive and only one meal was out of pocket (a routine expense during the work week). The other events took multiple tanks of gas each and all meals were on the economy.

-- The development of a time-series narrative was exacting even for “just” a one-day observation (times ten); and the coding was tedious.

But each of these “tradeoffs” was nominal in consideration of the relatively short timeframe related to the field work for this study.

There is good reason why a lengthier study might be undertaken.

At least one study suggests that a minimum of three days is needed simply to obtain “stabilized” data (Martinko & Gardner, 1990, p. 333). However, even “stimulated” behavior has the potential “to contribute theoretically important and coherent results” (Sillars, 1991, p. 214).

There also is a case to be made for using a larger number of subjects.

Although a small sample size is not necessarily a threat to an exploratory design or other interpretivistic approaches (like case studies for instance), there is an intuitive

sense that more is better; and if quantitative and qualitative methods are to be employed together, larger sample sizes will be needed to allow inferential statistical calculations and to improve generalizability, too. (for instance, see Martinko & Gardner, 1985).

Naturally, any lengthening of the breadth and scope of this type of study could add costs and require greater planning related to logistics. Similarly, one should expect a proportional increase in workload related to recording and coding observed behavior and account for such in the design of any expanded effort.

CHAPTER IV

DATA AND FINDINGS

> A fact is nothing in itself, it has value only through the idea connected with it or through the proof it supplies.
>
> Claude Bernard (1927, p. 53)

The data and results of this study will be presented in three contexts corresponding to separate sections in this chapter – demographic descriptions, time-on-activity observations and triangulation of advice-seeking behavior.

The first context encompasses basic characterizations of the subjects in terms of gender, race/ethnicity, education attainment, tenure (in terms of current years in place, and, in total years of experience as a superintendent), accession points to the profession, and age. Some observations are offered about how the factors of gender and age might strategically shape the future of the profession. But discussion about how demographic factors might relate to time-on-activity observations and advice-seeking behavior will be presented in those respective sections.

Regarding time-on-activity observations, data will be analyzed in context of previous studies to provide a comparison of how the current environment of reform and technology has impacted what superintendents do.

Finally, individual interviews with each of the ten subjects will be triangulated among the others as well as with the various observation records to offer insights about the subjects' advice seeking behavior as it relates to strategic decision making.

Demographics

The results of any behavioral study can only be understood within the context of the data describing the subjects whose behavior is being observed.

In that regard, the ten subjects of the present study already have been presented in terms of the sizes of their school districts, comparing favorably with all school systems in Tennessee and looking broadly representative of districts in the U.S. (see discussion on pages 58-63 in the previous chapter). The group also looked similar to all of Tennessee in terms of geography of their schools.

Table 2 Selected Demographics: Sample; U.S. Superintendents; Fortune 500 CEOs

	Sample	[1] U.S.	[2] CEOs
Gender	20 %	22 %	2.8 %
Race	0	6.2 %	3.2 %
Age (avg. years)	54.9	54.6	*54
Tenure (avg. years)	5	6	6
Turnover rate	**20 %	16.9 %	[3] 17.4 %
Education (doctorate)	80 %	51 %	***67 %

Sources: [1] Glass & Franceschini (2007); [2] Felichelli (2008); [3] Kaplan & Minton (2006)

*Median; **First year of contract; ***Professional or other advance degree

As for personal demographics, the 10-member sample included 2 women and no ethnics:

-- 22 percent of superintendents in the U.S. are female (Glass & Franceschini, 2007, p. 5) and 16.9 percent in Tennessee (calculated using T.O.S.S., 2009)

-- lack of racial diversity in the sample group contrasts with 6.2 percent racial minorities among superintendents in the U.S. (Glass & Franceschini, 2007, p. 18) and 3.7 percent in the state (calculated using T.O.S.S., 2009).

The sample group also seems to differ somewhat from superintendents nationally on the bases of tenure and education:

-- two subjects hold a master's degree only and eight possess doctorates, but nationwide only about half of superintendents have earned doctorates (Glass & Franceschini, 2007, p. 41)

-- seven of the participants' were in their first contract at their present position (two had less than 1 year of tenure; another two had less than 2 years, and three had less than 4 years) compared to 42.2 percent nationally (p. 27)

-- three of the subjects were in their first superintendency compared to "just over 50 percent" of all superintendents (p. 28)

In the sample group, the higher number of those who are in their first contract can be explained in part by the coming churn described in the AASA report that 39 percent of respondents expected to be retired in 5 years and that about 46 percent did not expect to be working as a superintendent (p. xviii). Using a turnover rate calculated for 2005 -2006, the researchers estimated that "in 5 years nearly 80% of all superintendents will retire or change positions" (p. xvii). Consequently, having seven out of ten subjects in the present study who are serving in their first contract does not seem out of line in view of the turnover that was predicted.

Regarding the disparity in levels of education attained, the lack of districts with fewer than 300 students in Tennessee (and in the sample) compared to 18 percent in the U.S. could explain why a larger percentage of subjects in the present study hold terminal degrees – because more than 83 percent of superintendents of small districts reported they did not hold doctorates (Glass et al, 2000, p. 131).

This underrepresentation of small districts also might explain the small sample number of first-time superintendents. The 2000 AASA survey showed that about a third of superintendents of small districts had served three years or fewer as a superintendent (p. 43, Table 4.16), indicating that small districts likely provide a good number of entry-level positions. The next highest percentage -- 20.8 -- was for districts having 300 to 2,999 students (ibid.). So a lack of representation of small school districts (fewer than 300 pupils) could also explain at least in part why there are fewer first-time superintendents in the sample.

Interestingly, in the sample, two of the first-time superintendents are female and both were fairly late entering the superintendency -- one was about 49 years old upon becoming a superintendent and the other about 60 years old, compared to the typical entry level age of 40 years old (Glass & Franceschini, 2007, p. 26). Moreover, both have districts that are among the larger systems in the state and the U.S. (enrollments of between 10,000 and 24,999). Also, both rose to the top spot from a central office position: one from within the district and the other from another school system. This information comports with the data for all women entering the superintendency. Glass et al. (2000) found that “women generally enter their first administrative positions later than men and the superintendency later” and that on average are older than their male

counterparts (p. 79). The mean age for women in the sample was 57.5 years old compared to 54.3 years old for the men.

Lastly, the sample compared favorably with the national population on the demographic of age and on what educational positions served as entry points to the superintendency:

-- five male subjects entered the superintendency from a principalship, compared to 52 percent nationally (Glass & Franceschini, 2007, p. 35); of the remaining men, three came from a central office position compared to 38.2 percent overall (ibid.)

-- subjects in the present study had an average age of 54.9 years and the AASA mid-decade survey reported an estimated mean age of 54.6 years (p. 15)

The influence of these demographics on strategic decision making behavior will be discussed in the following sections of this chapter. However it is important to note at this point how the factors of age and gender possibly will strategically shape the future of the profession.

Gender

Several factors combine to suggest that growing numbers of female superintendents will continue.

Women continue to enter college and earn degrees at higher numbers than men, a trend that began in 1974 (National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2010b), and although men still hold more doctorates and professional degrees than women (U.S. Census Bureau (USCB), 2011), since 2006-07 women have surpassed men each year in attaining these terminal degrees (NCES, 2010c). Some might dismiss the power of having

this credential -- as only slightly more than half of current superintendents have a doctorate (Glass & Franceschini, 2007, p. 41). But the case also is growing that women holding this degree will be more competitive with men having similar work level experiences.

In that regard, women likely will gain an advantage in the ongoing environment of educational reform. They outnumber men by margins of more than 3 to 1 in the classroom, composing 76 percent of public school teachers (NCES, 2010a), and generally have amassed much more classroom experience by the time they seek a spot in the superintendency (Glass & Franceschini, 2007, p. 16). Consequently, with the increased expectations school boards have about instructional leadership (p. 71, Table 6.3), it is reasonable to conclude that women will be even more competitive for future superintendent openings, holding all other factors equal.

Another equalizer for women is the number of women who serve on school boards. Hess (2001) reported that on average across district size, females were 40 percent of school board members (p. 25) – composing 39.9 percent of school boards for medium sized districts and 44.4 percent for large systems. But the number of women board members is growing, so consideration of women candidates for superintendent is likely to increase. Hess and Meeks (2010) found that women now are 44 percent of all school board members, and are the majority on boards for medium and large school systems (p. 38, Table 1).

For comparison, women hold only 15 percent of all board seats at Fortune 500 firms (Dillow, 2008) – and this power disadvantage translates into a mere 2.8 percent of female CEOs at these companies (Felicelli, 2008).

Age

The 2007 AASA survey notes that the mean age of superintendents has moved to the right during the past seven years, increasing from 52 years old to 54 years old, "denoting the oldest group of superintendents found in any past AASA study" going back to 1923 (Glass & Franceschini, 2007, pp. xix, 1); and, they offer that the graying of the superintendency "will likely continue to increase as superintendents enter the profession later in their public education careers" (p. 16).

The study's investigators offer a number of possibilities to explain this aging phenomenon:

-- "a majority of superintendents now make a stop in a central office position before moving on to the superintendency" (p. 8)

-- "the increasing number of women entering the administrative ranks later in their careers" (ibid.)

-- "a number of new superintendents have entered the profession after they achieved 'safety' in the state teacher retirement system and can afford the perceived precariousness of the superintendency" (ibid.)

However, the age of superintendents is in line with the age of CEOs.

In a 2008 survey, executive search firm Spencer Stuart found that Fortune 500 CEOs had a median age of 54 years old, and that 66 percent of new CEOs were between 50 and 59 years old (Felichelli, 2008).

CEOs and superintendents are alike on other indicators, too.

Superintendents and CEOs have similar recent turnover rates of about 17 percent (Glass & Franceschini, 2007, p. xvii; Kaplan and Minton, 2008) -- which correspond to

tenures of approximately 6 years each (Glass & Franceschini, 2007, xvii; Felichelli, 2008, p. 6). And these top executives share typical retirement ages: between 57 and 58 years old for superintendents (Glass & Franceschini, 2007, p. 16) and about 58 years old for CEOs (Kaplan and Minton, 2006, p. 2).

Consequently, the aging of the superintendency does not seem out of norm with what is happening with other chief executives.

Regardless, demographic factors such as these must continue to be regularly scanned in order to anticipate leadership needs in the central office -- and the classroom -- as our education system moves forward to meet the challenges of the next decades.

Time-on-activity analysis

At first blush it might seem incongruent or perhaps superfluous to revisit what superintendents do in terms of conducting a time-on-activity study in conjunction with research about advice seeking tendencies related to strategic decision making. However, this sphere of focus is particularly relevant to the present study. Many of the time-on-activity studies referenced in the education literature were conducted prior to 1983, the year that *A Nation at Risk* was published, and before the nearly three decades of school reform that were launched because of the dire assessments it contained.

Epitomized by the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act 2001, there has been an increasing focus on strategic change, and on the AASA mid-decade study superintendents seemed to indicate the shift has impacted what superintendents do. They identified *strategic planning* and *systemic thinking* as the top training needs for

professional development (Glass & Franceschini, 2007), signaling "the need for content and instruction to align with changes taking place in schools" (Glass et al., 2000, p. 137). These broader skill sets fundamentally differ in nature from the specific mechanics of the job that were largely named in the last full decade AASA study (ibid.).

Time-on-activity findings from the present study prove the value of once again visiting the research sphere of what superintendents do. Some corroborate previous conclusions, but others differ from the older data and signal that superintendents are experiencing a time of adjustment (if not a permanent transition) in the nature of their profession. Moreover, these insights add dimension to each subject's views about advice seeking and strategic decision making, and in some cases were a valuable check to what was said in the interview.

Brief and fragmented but purposeful

In his foundational time-on-activity study, Mintzberg (1973) offered that "in contrast to activities performed by most nonmanagers, those of the manager are characterized by brevity, variety, and fragmentation" (p. 51). Specifically regarding brevity, he found that the chief executives in his subject group completed about half of observed activities "in less than nine minutes, and only one-tenth took more than an hour" (p.33). Findings in follow-on studies about superintendents largely agreed (e.g. Morris, 1979; Duignan, 1980; Pitner & Ogawa, 1981), with an exception noted by Larson et al., (1981).

Larson and his colleagues found that the mean duration for all activities for the composite profile of their group was 6.1 minutes (p. 32), clearly within the bounds of

brevity as defined by Mintzberg. However, they took exception with Mintzberg's threshold because of the variance their data revealed -- in their study the mean duration for all activities for individual superintendents ranged from 4.7 to 9.9 minutes (ibid.). They also expressed skepticism about Mintzberg's conclusion about fragmentation, commenting that the subjects in their sample "completed 92.6 percent of their activities without interruption" and that "the remaining 7.4 percent of their activities were continued" after the interruption (ibid.).

However, Mintzberg's points about fragmentation and variety were less about a specific numerical threshold and more about drawing a comparison between the differences in the nature of work at the executive level and the specialization of most jobs that concentrate on one or just a few tasks or issues that are "highly rationalized, repetitive, uninterrupted" (Guest as cited in Mintzberg, 1973, p. 31).

The present study found brevity to be an apt description of its subjects' activities (Table 3) -- especially with regard to personal interactions (Table 4).

Excluding lunches, 337 activities were recorded for the ten subjects combined. More than half of the events (195) involved contacts with others and 128 of these were nine minutes or fewer in length (or about 66 percent of contacts). Additionally, 51 out of 84 noncontact activities (excluding lunch, personal time, observer interaction and travel) were completed in fewer than 9 minutes (60 percent), and combined with personal interactions, amounted to about 53 percent of the total observations (179 out of 337) -- consistent with Mintzberg's finding that about half of managers' activities are brief.

Also, as might be intuited, although brevity (9 minutes or fewer in length) described more than half of all *activities* in terms of actual numbers, it was not an

Table 3 Selected Comparisons With Other Time-On-Activity Studies

	Sample	Mintzberg (1973)	Duignan (1980)	Pitner & Ogawa (1981)	Larson et al. (1979)
*≤ 9 mins.	53	49	65	60	81
*≥ 60 mins.	11	10	unk	7	1
**Activities per Day (freq.)	34	22	38	unk	80
**Length of Work Day (hrs.)	8.2	8.1	8.2	unk	8.0
**Duration of Activities (min.)	14.5	22.0	12.7	unk	6.0

*Whole-number percentage of all observations for each respective study.
**Average for each respective study.
Morris (1980) is excluded because his data was collected in 5 minute blocks.
Variance among these studies is due largely to modifications each research project made to Mintzberg's classification schemes for activities and purposes (Larson et al., 1979, p. 15)

Table 4 Events Lasting Fewer Than 9 Minutes Or More Than 60 Minutes

Superintendent		Contact				Noncontact			TOTAL	
	***N, all contacts** (dyadic/multiple)	Dyadic ≤ 9	Dyadic ≥ 60	Multiple ≤ 9	Multiple ≥ 60	***N, all noncontact**	≤ 9	≥ 60	≤ 9	≥ 60
1	**28** (21/7)	16	0	4	1	**15**	11	0	31	1
2	**13** (10/3)	8	0	0	2	**5**	2	1	10	3
3	**33** (25/8)	23	0	4	0	**11**	6	2	33	2
4	**20** (13/7)	9	0	3	0	**2**	0	1	12	1
5	**21** (17/4)	16	0	0	1	**10**	6	0	22	1
6	**19** (16/3)	12	0	0	0	**12**	5	2	17	2
7	**14** (10/4)	7	1	1	1	**2**	1	0	9	2
8	**17** (7/10)	7	0	2	2	**6**	6	0	15	2
9	**16** (13/3)	9	1	0	0	**16**	11	0	20	1
10	**14** (8/6)	5	0	2	3	**5**	3	0	10	3
COMPOSITE	**195** (140/55)	112	2	16	10	**84**	51	6	179	18

*Exclude Lunch, Personal Time, Observer Interaction and Travel (unless coded for Purpose).

Also, as might be intuited, although brevity (9 minutes or fewer in length) described more than half of all *activities* in terms of actual numbers, it was not an appropriate description of the superintendents' total day. In context of *time* these events took up merely 519 minutes of 4,923 minutes total, or just 10.5 percent of the superintendents' work.

Furthermore, despite inclinations perhaps to assume that short, multiple events represent evidence of what superintendents complain of as "too many insignificant, yet time-consuming demands" that limit effectiveness (Glass, 2001, p. 2), other factors seem to suggest differently.

First, 33.6 percent (43 of 128) of the brief contacts were initiated by the superintendents.

Second, although superintendent control (initiating an event) might not fully suggest an activity was not a trivial or an ineffective use of his or her time, the purpose codes of these encounters indicate that though brief, the contacts were valuable use of superintendents' time:

-- 34 of 128 brief activities, or 26.6 percent, were used to discuss strategy (defined as "contacts dealing with important organizational decisions, such as staffing, budgeting, new directions, etc." (Larson, et al., 1981, p. 48))

-- 22 events (17.2 percent) were used by the manager to request action by others

-- 47 (36.7 percent) were activities that gave the superintendent information (coded "Receiving") and largely these were follow-up responses to an active issue

So, while short and seemingly unrelated, these encounters actually allowed the superintendent to reduce uncertainty about key issues and to reinforce his or her position

as the central figure or nexus for important communications within the school system. For instance, one superintendent made short phone calls to several contacts to make sure all concerned were on the same page regarding a strategic construction initiative -- prior to a school board meeting that evening. Another used brief encounters to gather information and gage reactions to a heated town hall meeting (regarding a school closure) that took place the night before. A third subject used brief contacts to move along several items simultaneously.

Consequently, while superintendent activities can be described in terms of brevity, variety and fragmentation, these characteristics may actually describe a high level of order in a superintendent's work rather than a reflection of *catch as catch can* in the routine.

In the end, Larson and his colleagues might have some valid points about definitions. "Variety" might best be defined by couching it in terms of a "number of unique events" (Larson et al., 1981, p. 32). Likewise, "fragmentation" might best be understood as "the degree to which" such unique events are "interrupted" (ibid.).

But Mintzberg's point was that variety was less about unique events and more a matter of "dealing with a distinct issue" (1973, p. 31). He said that interruptions were a choice the executive made to ensure "the flow of current information" (pp. 34-35). He found that his *subjects* "not the other parties, terminated many of the meetings and telephone calls." He also observed that it was the *subjects* who chose to interrupt their desk work "to place telephone calls or to request that subordinates come by" (p. 34).

In other words, variety and fragmentation are not prevailing conditions that shape an executive's work, but products of how he or she controls work. Still, he said

executives are “encouraged by the realities” of work “to do things abruptly, to avoid wasting time, to participate only when the value of participation is tangible” (p. 35).

One-to-one, centralized & internally focused

The ten subjects in the sample confirmed several general findings of previous time-on-activity studies (see Table 5). In a nutshell, the previous studies described superintendent behavior as dominated by personal interaction, typically one-on-one, heavily geared toward immediate staff members and oriented in and immediately around her or his office.

Table 5 Comparison Of General Observations About Superintendents Among Selected Time-On-Activity Studies (percent of time)

	Sample	Mintzberg (1973)	Morris (1979)	Duignan (1980)	Larson et al. (1981)	Pitner & Ogawa (1981)
Verbal (% work time) [1]	62	78	60	72	53	80
Dyadic (% contact time)	40	56	61	unk	77	82
Subordinate-centric [2]	36	48	23	31	22	49
Front office-oriented [3]	73	39	unk	unk	66	46

[1] Includes meetings, telephone calls and tours.
[2] Superintendents had the most contact with immediate subordinates in all studies.
[3] The executive’s office was the location with the highest superintendent activity across studies.

Subjects in the present study were highly verbal (195 of 337 events, or 57.9 percent, and 3068 of 4923 minutes, or 62.3 percent), favoring in-person contact in the form of scheduled meetings (11.9 percent of 337 events; 39.3 percent of 4,923 minutes), unscheduled meetings (23.7 percent; 15.7 percent), telephone calls (19.0 percent; 5.8

percent) and tours (3.3 percent; 1.6 percent) (Table 6). Combined, these accounted for 57.9 percent of all activities and 62.3 percent of the workday (excluding lunch, unless coded for Purpose). Moreover, 140 of 195 contacts were dyadic, or put another way, 71.8 of the group's personal interactions were one-on-one (Table 4). However, in terms of contact time the sample only spent 40 percent of conversations in one-on-one interaction, while none of the comparison groups spent less than half of contact time in dyadic conversations (Table 5).

But there is a potential scheduling bias that likely figures into this data difference: five of the sample group scheduled the observation on a date coinciding with a regularly scheduled monthly meeting for central office staff or building supervisors; one set up the observation on the same day of a weekly staff meeting; another chose a date that included a monthly community group meeting and two specially called meetings with local government officials; and one chose to attend the morning portion of an in-service training event with high school teachers. On face value alone, it is easy enough to conclude this facet of scheduling was not random. Still, despite this artificially high concentration of scheduled meetings, paired interactions amounted to 40 percent of contact time -- showing the strong daily influence of this relational form.

Most of the activities took place in the executives' offices. The composite figures showed that 82.1 percent of events happened there, accounting for 73.2 percent of the day (Table 7). This is not a surprising finding given that the superintendent is the central communicator for the school system -- "the nerve center for the organization" (Mintzberg, 1973, p. 145). Likewise, the structure of the central office (across school systems) fosters such communication centrality -- everyone in the central office supports

Table 6 Superintendent Activity

Superintendent	1 f/t	2 f/t	3 f/t	4 f/t	5 f/t	6 f/t	7 f/t	8 f/t	9 f/t	10 f/t	Total f/t
Desk Work	15/148 30.6/26.2 (9.9)	5/166 19.2/32.2 (33.2)	11/259 23.4/49.3 (23.5)	2/134 8.0/32.4 (67.0)	10/107 26.3/24.0 (10.7)	12/270 31.5/50.6 (22.5)	2/19 10.0/3.6 (8.0)	6/29 19.4/5.9 (4.8)	16/162 41.0/32.3 (10.1)	5/87 20.8/21.3 (17.4)	84/1,381 24.9/28.1 (16.4)
Telephone	10/63 20.4/11.2 (6.3)	5/22 19.2/4.3 (4.4)	13/65 27.7/12.4 (5.0)	6/12 24.0/2.9 (2.0)	2/9 5.3/2.0 (4.5)	8/29 2.1/5.4 (3.6)	5/14 25.0/2.7 (2.8)	6/14 19.4/2.9 (2.3)	6/40 15.4/8.0 (6.7)	3/18 12.5/4.4 (6.0)	64/286 19.0/5.8 (4.5)
Scheduled	3/137 6.1/24.2 (45.7)	4/225 15.4/43.6 (56.3)	4/65 8.5/12.4 (23.5)	4/104 16.0/25.1 (26.0)	5/218 13.1/49.0 (48.8)	2/57 5.3/10.7 (28.5)	3/407 15.0/77.5 (135.7)	7/336 22.6/68.9 (48.0)	3/150 7.7/29.9 (50.0)	5/234 20.8/57.2 (46.8)	40/1933 11.9/39.3 (48.3)
Unscheduled	11/149 22.4/26.4 (13.5)	3/23 11.5/4.5 (7.7)	14/113 29.8/21.5 (8.1)	10/145 40.0/35.0 (14.5)	13/75 34.2/16.9 (5.8)	8/98 21.0/18.4 (12.2)	5/44* 25.0/8.4 (8.8)	4/23 12.9/4.7 (5.8)	6/75 15.4/14.9 (12.5)	6/27 25.0/6.6 (4.5)	80/772 23.7/15.7 (9.65)
Tours	4/13 8.2/2.3 (3.3)	1/4 3.8/0.8 (25.0)	2/11 4.3/2.1 (5.5)	-- -- 	1/3 2.6/0.7 (3.0)	1/14 2.6/2.6 (14.0)	1/20 5.8/3.8 (20.0)	-- 	1/12 2.6/2.4 (12.0)	-- 	11/77 3.3/1.6 (7.0)
Travel	2/30 4.1/5.3 (15.0)	6/66 23.1/12.8 (11.0)	2/6 4.3/1.1 (3.0)	2/15 8.0/3.6 (7.5)	4/22 10.5/4.9 (5.5)	2/24 5.3/4.5 (12.0)	-- 	3/24 9.7/4.9 (8.0)	6/57 15.4/11.4 (9.5)	4/39 16.7/9.5 (9.8)	31/283 9.2/5.5 (8.7)
Other	4/25 8.2/4.4 (6.3)	2/10 7.7/1.9 (5.0)	1/6 2.1/1.1 (6.0)	1/4 4.0/1.0 (4.0)	3/11 7.9/2.5 (3.7)	5/42 13.2/7.9 (8.4)	4/21 20.0/4.0 (5.25)	5/62 16.1/12.7 (12.4)	1/6 2.6/1.2 (6.0)	1/4 4.2/1.0 (4.0)	27/191 8.0/3.9 (7.1)
Totals	49/565 14.5/11.5 (11.5)	26/516 7.7/10.5 (19.8)	47/525 13.9/10.7 (11.2)	25/414 7.4/8.4 (16.6)	38/445 11.2/9.0 (11.7)	38/534 11.2/10.8 (14.1)	20/525 5.9/10.7 (26.3)	31/488 9.1/9.9 (15.7)	39/502 12.1/10.2 (12.9)	24/409 7.1/8.3 (17.0)	337/4923 100/100 (14.6)

NOTES: The top pair in each 4-element cell has the frequency/time (minutes) for that activity. The bottom pair represents the percentages of the top pair with respect to the total number of events/total time of all activities for the respective superintendent (sums should read 100 percent down each column excluding “Totals” row which reads 100 percent across). Lunches are not included except that two were coded under an activity code other than “lunch” because the primary purpose was other than eating a meal. The parenthetical number below each 4-element cell is the average number of minutes for that activity for that superintendent. “Other” includes “Personal Time” and “Observer Interactions.” *Includes response to a bomb threat.

Table 7 Location of Superintendent Contacts

Superintendent	1 f/t	2 f/t	3 f/t	4 f/t	5 f/t	6 f/t	7 f/t	8 f/t	9 f/t	10 f/t	Total f/t
Superintendent's Office	21/198 75.0/54.7 (9.4)	9/87 69.2/31.8 (9.7)	31/243 93.9/95.7 (7.8)	20/261 100/100 (13.1)	16/232 76.2/76.1 (14.5)	15/100 78.9/50.5 (6.7)	13/465 92.9/95.9 (35.8)	14/321 82.4/86.1 (22.9)	13/240 81.3/86.6 (18.5)	8/100 57.1/35.8 (12.5)	160/2247 82.1/73.2 (14.0)
Immediate Subordinate's Office	6/60 21.4/16.6 (10.0)	--	1/3 3.0/1.2 (3.0)	--	4/16 19.0/5.2 (4.0)	3/50 15.8/25.3 (16.7)	1/20 7.1/4.1 (20.0)	--	--	1/3 7.1/1.1 (3.0)	16/152 8.2/5.0 (9.5)
Other Areas of School System	--	3/122 23.1/44.5 (40.7)	1/8 3.0/3.1 (8.0)	--	--	1/48 5.3/24.2 (48.0)	--	3/52 17.6/13.9 (17.3)	3/37 18.8/13.4 (34.3)	--	11/267 5.6/8.7 (24.3)
Other Administrative Subordinate's Office	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Outside School	1/104 3.6/28.7 (104.0)	1/65 7.7/23.7 (65.0)	--	--	1/57 4.8/18.7 (57.0)	--	--	--	--	5/176 35.7/63.1 (35.2)	8/402 4.1/13.1 (50.3)
Totals	28/362 14.4/11.8 (12.9)	13/274 6.7/8.9 (21.1)	33/254 16.9/8.3 (7.7)	20/261 10.3/8.5 (13.1)	21/305 10.8/9.9 (14.5)	19/198 9.6/6.5 (10.4)	14/485 7.1/15.8 (34.6)	17/373 8.7/12.2 (21.9)	16/277 8.2/9.0 (17.3)	14/279 7.2/9.1 (19.9)	195/3068 100/100 (15.7)

NOTES: Reflects Contact Time only. The top pair in each 4-element cell has the frequency/time (minutes) for that activity. The bottom pair represents the percentages of the top pair with respect to the total number of events/total time for all activities for the respective superintendent (sums should read 100 percent down each column excluding "Totals" row which reads 100 percent across). Lunches are not included except that two were coded under an activity code other than "lunch" because the primary purpose was other than eating a meal. Travel, Personal Time, and Interaction with Observer were not coded for location. The parenthetical number below each 4-element cell is the average number of minutes for that activity for that superintendent.

the district-wide enterprise but each person is a “direct report” to the superintendent.

Directors of schools overwhelmingly spoke most often with immediate subordinates (Table 8), accounting for 44.1 percent of interactions and 36.0 percent of contact time. The 86 occurrences and 1,106 minutes far surpassed the number of incidents and the total time spent with any other group: outsiders (37 interactions, 422 minutes), principals (23 events, 548 minutes), teachers (11 events for 493 minutes) and school board members (17 contacts amounting to 237 minutes). Whether using a traditional view of span of control (5 to 7 immediate followers) as optimal (Hughes, Ginnett, & Curphy, 1996, p. 336), or a contemporary perspective (“50 to 70 will not be uncommon” (Hattrup & Kleiner, 1993, p.29)) such a hierarchy of relationships would be considered a natural management outcome.

A top performing executive would touch base with directors to ensure “alignments,” then spend time with immediate subordinates to inform them and delegate immediate supervision and management of people and programs. Building managers would be next on the list because of their frontline leadership and management responsibilities, and direct contact with classroom managers. Some interaction with teachers would be expected, but with principals giving primary direction to this group. The fact that outsiders would be the second highest group of contacts serves to reinforce the image of the superintendent as the central communicator for the district.

Environmental change

While the present study has confirmed previous studies’ findings with regard to “types of activities” and “with whom” and “where” superintendents interact, it has

Table 8 Identities of Superintendent Contacts

Superintendent	1 f/t	2 f/t	3 f/t	4 f/t	5 f/t	6 f/t	7 f/t	8 f/t	9 f/t	10 f/t	Total f/t
School Board	2/30 7.1/8.3 (15.0)	2/8 15.4/2.9 (4.0)	1/4 3.0/1.6 (4.0)	4/79 20.0/30.3 (19.8)	1/32 4.8/10.5 (32.0)	1/23 5.3/11.6 (23.0)	--	--	4/54 25.0/19.5 (13.5)	2/7 14.3/2.5 (3.5)	17/237 8.7/7.7 (13.9)
Peers	--	--	--	--	--	2/5 10.5/2.5 (2.5)	--	--	--	1/4 7.1/1.4 (4.0)	3/9 1.5/0.3 (3.0)
Principals	3/16 10.7/4.4 (5.3)	5/82 38.5/29.9 (16.4)	6/38 18.2/15.0 (6.3)	2/5 10.0/1.9 (2.5)	--	--	2/264 14.3/54.4 (132.0)	1/75 5.9/20.1 (75.0)	3/8 18.8/2.9 (2.7)	1/60 7.1/21.5 (60.0)	23/548 11.8/17.9 (23.8)
Teachers	2/124 7.1/34.3 (62.0)	1/55 7.7/20.1 (55.0)	--	--	1/3 4.8/1.0 (3.0)	--	--	5/181 29.4/48.5 (36.2)	1/42 6.3/15.2 (42.0)	1/88 7.1/31.5 (88.0)	11/493 5.6/16.1 (44.8)
Students	--	--	--	--	1/57 4.8/18.7 (57.0)	--	--	--	1/22 6.3/7.9 (22.0)	--	2/79 1.0/2.6 (39.5)
Immediate Subordinates	12/115 42.9/31.8 (9.6)	2/45 15.4/16.4 (22.5)	21/150 63.6/59.1 (7.1)	11/138 55.0/52.9 (12.5)	14/148 66.7/48.5 (10.6)	8/80 42.1/40.4 (10.0)	5/175 35.7/36.1 (35.0)	6/104 35.3/27.9 (17.3)	4/137 25.0/49.5 (34.3)	3/14 21.4/5.0 (4.7)	86/1106 44.1/36.0 (12.9)
Asst. Principals	--	--	--	--	--	--	2/3 14.3/0.6 (1.5)	--	--	--	2/3 1.0/0.1 (1.5)
Custodians, etc.	3/31 10.7/8.6 (10.3)	--	1/4 3.0/1.6 (4.0)	1/1 5.0/0.4 (1.0)	--	--	--	--	--	--	5/36 2.6/1.2 (7.2)
Parents	2/19 7.1/5.2 (9.5)	1/4 7.7/1.5 (4.0)	1/43 3.0/16.9 (43.0)	--	3/63 14.3/20.7 (21.0)	--	2/6 14.3/1.2 (3.0)	--	--	--	9/135 4.6/4.4 (15.0)
Outsiders	4/27 14.3/7.5 (6.8)	2/80 15.4/29.2 (40.0)	3/15 9.1/5.9 (5.0)	2/38 10.0/14.6 (19.0)	1/2 4.8/0.7 (2.0)	8/90 42.1/45.5 (11.3)	3/37 21.4/7.6 (12.3)	5/13 29.4/3.5 (17.3)	3/14 18.8/5.1 (4.7)	6/106 42.9/38.0 (17.7)	37/422 19.0/13.8 (11.4)

NOTES: Reflects Contact Time only. The top pair in each 4-element cell has the frequency/time (minutes) for that contact. The bottom pair represents the percentages of the top pair with respect to the total number of events/total time of all contacts for the respective superintendent (sums should read 100 percent down each column).) Lunches are not included except that two were coded under an activity code other than “lunch” because the primary purpose was other than eating a meal. Travel, Personal Time, and Interaction with Observer are not included. The parenthetical number below each 4-element cell is the average number of min utes for that activity for that superintendent.

uncovered a shift in purposes hinted at by the AASA midterm study (respondents identified *strategic planning* and *systemic thinking* as the top two priorities for professional development) and intuited from an ever-increasing emphasis on accountability by state and federal legislation.

Observations revealed that the group spent 33 percent of all Purpose time engaged in strategy. But as a component of Contact time, strategy composed 46 percent of interactions (Table 9 provides Purpose data, and Table 7 gives total Contact Time). Only one non-contact event was coded as strategy (29 minutes total).

For comparison:

-- Mintzberg's subjects were involved in strategy 13 percent of Contact Time (1973, Table 13, p. 251). He illustrated his concept of strategy in terms of four decision-making roles (pp. 77-91) and defined a strategic decision in terms of "a series of smaller" choices (p. 191) that "in an operational sense" pertain to "an explicit statement of a proposed set of improvement projects, integrated for mutual complementarity" (p. 159). In this regard his description closely parallels the one used for the present research study, except that he allowed the handling of "a severe conflict between two subordinates" to count as "strategy" (p. 257). Regardless, his executives, who included only one school superintendent, engaged in strategy behavior at a much lesser percentage than the sample group (13 percent compared to 33 percent), although the superintendent spent the second-highest amount of interactions involved in strategy (22 percent) (Table 13, p. 251).

-- Pitner and Ogawa took items coded as Strategy and combined them with those coded as Negotiation to form a Decision Making category that still described only 21 percent of contact time (1981, Table 4, p. 54).

Table 9 Purposes for Superintendent Activity

Superintendent	1 f/t	2 f/t	3 f/t	4 f/t	5 f/t	6 f/t	7 f/t	8 f/t	9 f/t	10 f/t	Total f/t
Nonmanagerial	-- --	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Ceremony	1/8 2.5/1.6 (8.0)	1/65 5.9/14.9 (65.0)	--	--	1/57 3.3/15.0 (57.0)	--	--	--	1/22 3.1/5.0 (22.0)	1/12 5.3/3.3 (12.0)	5/164 1.9/3.8 (32.8)
Scheduling	5/10 12.5/2.0 (2.0)	--	1/2 2.4/0.4 (2.0)	--	--	--	--	--	3/9 9.4/2.1 (3.0)	1/1 5.3/0.3 (1.0)	10/22 3.7/0.5 (2.2)
Status Requests	--	--	1/6 2.4/1.2 (6.0)	--	--	--	1/4 5.9/0.8 (4.0)	--	--	--	2/10 0.7/0.2 (5.0)
Action Requests	1/7 2.5/1.4 (7.0)	1/19 5.9/4.4 (19.0)	1/43 2.4/8.6 (43.0)	2/27 9.1/6.8 (13.5)	--	--	--	--	2/31 6.3/7.1 (15.5)	--	7/127 2.6/2.9 (18.1)
Manager Requests	8/36 20.0/7.2 (4.5)	5/34 29.4/7.8 (6.8)	7/35 16.7/7.0 (5.0)	1/9 4.5/2.3 (9.0)	--	1/8 3.4/1.8 (8.0)	--	--	3/46 9.4/10.6 (15.3)	--	25/168 9.3/3.9 (6.7)
Receiving	7/66 17.5/13.1 (9.4)	4/111 23.5/25.5 (27.8)	11/52 26.2/10.4 (4.7)	4/35 18.2/8.9 (8.8)	7/24 23.3/6.3 (3.4)	5/24 17.2/5.3 (4.8)	6/47 35.3/9.7 (7.8)	3/21 13.6/5.3 (7.0)	3/12 9.4/2.8 (4.0)	2/4 10.5/1.1 (2.0)	52/396 19.3/9.1 (7.6)
Giving	9/136 22.5/27.0 (15.1)	5/152 29.4/34.9 (30.4)	10/257 23.8/51.2 (25.7)	2/134 9.1/33.9 (67.0)	12/87 40.0/23.0 (7.3)	12/273 41.4/60.1 (22.8)	2/19 11.8/3.9 (9.5)	8/76 36.4/19.0 (9.5)	12/145 37.5/33.3 (12.1)	4/86 21.1/23.5 (21.5)	76/1365 28.1/31.3 (18.0)
Review	--	--	3/42 7.1/8.4 (14.0)	5/84 22.7/21.3 (16.8)	2/124 6.7/32.7 (62.0)	--	--	2/185 9.1/46.3 (92.5)	2/78 6.3/17.9 (39.0)	1/4 5.3/1.1 (4.0)	15/517 5.6/11.9 (34.5)
Strategy	7/207 17.5/41.2 (29.6)	1/55 5.9/12.6 (55.0)	8/65 19.0/12.9 (8.1)	7/83 31.8/21.0 (11.9)	5/23 16.7/6.1 (4.6)	11/149 37.9/32.8 (13.5)	6/391 35.3/80.8 (65.2)	8/114 36.4/28.5 (14.3)	6/93 18.8/21.3 (15.5)	10/259 52.6/70.8 (25.9)	69/1439 25.6/33.0 (20.9)
Negotiation	2/33 5.0/6.5 (16.5)	--	--	1/23 4.5/5.8 (23.0)	3/64 10.0/16.9 (21.3)	--	1/4 5.9/0.8 (4.0)	1/4 4.5/1.0 (4.0)	--	--	8/128 3.0/2.9 (16.0)
Other	--	--	--	--	--	--	1/19* 5.9/3.9 (19.0)	--	--	--	1/19 0.4/0.4 (19.0)

NOTES: The top pair in each 4-element cell has the frequency/time (minutes) for that purpose. The bottom pair represents the percentages of the top pair with respect to the total number of events/total time for all purposes for the respective superintendent (sums should read 100 percent down each column). “Other” includes purposes that do not fit other categories [*Handling of a bomb threat]. “Travel,” “Personal Time,” and “Observer Interactions” are excluded. “Observational Tours” that are not coded for purpose are omitted.

-- Larson et al. (1981) observed that their superintendents participated in strategy a mere 8.5 percent of contact time.

With regard to time spent on strategy, Duignan's (1980) Canadian administrators differed somewhat from their American counterparts in time-on-activity studies. He found that strategy, "developing planning and problem-solving strategies for system operation and school programming" (p. 16), amounted to 29.7 percent of contact time for his subjects, who were "school superintendents in the province of Alberta" (p. 7).

None of the other time-on-activity studies' subjects even approached this amount of strategy behavior. To that point, Duignan's executives were more like the superintendents in the present research, nearly 30 years apart. But a check of the social and political contexts embracing Alberta at that time explains this anomaly.

According to a monograph produced by the Alberta Teacher's Association, in 1980 the Trudeau administration implemented a federal initiative which in effect seized provincial energy resources (forced revenue sharing) causing a financial freeze that hit education especially hard as "the second-largest single program commitment in the provincial budget" (Ell, 2002). Also, a teacher strike in Calgary "pointed to some strains in Alberta's public education system" (ibid.). Finally, these developments "coincided with the appearance of public concern about declining educational standards and grade inflation" (ibid.).

These conditions combined to create a unique strategic environment that parallels the conditions of a budgetary squeeze and increasing accountability that served as the background for the field observations of the present study.

Triangulation of interviews

Before proceeding, it is worth noting the possible traps of a bounded rationality mindset when conducting research. This phenomenon explains how drawing a conclusion essentially becomes a process of bounding all the information at the time, looking at a cross section of it and applying relevant theory or practice to make sense of it.

The most obvious pitfall from such a mentality is assuming that the collected information for that moment in time adequately represents the full explanatory reality of the whole situation. However, a flawed assumption from one observation can be corrected in part by looking at another cross section of available information at another point in time and comparing it with the original information set -- to detect differences and make adjustments according to the new information.

With regard to interviews in this study, approximately three months after the first interviews, another interview was conducted by phone with six of the subjects (scheduling hindered follow up with three, and one had not completed a first interview). The format of the original interview was used and the six answered across each of the topic areas with few substantive deviations from what they previously said. However, these departures from the original interviews were useful to the analyses. Finally, each interview and observation record gave a “within pair” check for internal consistency, and public information sources (e.g. news articles, board minutes, weblogs) added perspective, too.

Collectively, the interviews revealed three important themes that will be presented.

First, the role of the superintendent has changed dramatically the last decade, and especially so since the referent time-on-activity studies were completed in the 1970s and 1980s.

Second, strategic matters are the norm of the routine and not an exception and these considerations drive daily activity.

Finally, advice-seeking patterns tended to follow four paths and the consequences for performance in the classroom could be dramatic.

Changing times

The role of the superintendent has evolved during nearly a century and a half to develop at this time into a position of great complexity. No longer is the superintendent "just" the supervisor of buildings, enforcer of bus schedules and manager of budgets. But she or he is expected as well to be a leader in the classroom; to negotiate with labor unions and at the same time direct teacher development; and be a change agent for the district -- as long as initiatives comport to state and federal mandates for reform. This sea change can be intuited from survey information such as naming *systemic thinking* and *strategic planning* as lacking in professional development programs (Glass & Franceschini, 2007), or by general statements by observers that superintendents consider the complexity of their jobs on par with CEOs (Hoyle, Bjork, Collier, & Glass, 2005).

The ten subjects were remarkably consistent about these changes regardless of the size and setting of the school system or personal demographics of the individual executive.

The superintendent of the smallest district in the sample was particularly vocal about the complexity of his position in terms of expectations of stakeholders.

> When I first became principal, the superintendent managed things, made sure buses ran and such, and the teacher took care of the classroom. [laughing] Now they still expect me to manage the things superintendents used to manage and they want me to be in the classroom. (*Three – *interviews are coded for confidentiality)

This individual had served equal time as an elected and appointed school superintendent.

But the chief executive of a large district (more than 10,000 enrolled students) agreed.

> Superintendents ten years ago had a completely different role – probably less involved in the leadership of academics and left that more to principals and more involved with budgets and even less with personnel because ten years ago in our state the board appointed the various personnel. Everything had to go for board approval, that's no longer the case with the appointed superintendent versus elected. (Eight)

Other superintendents offered similar views:

> My dad was a deputy superintendent with a school system for 12 years. Back then, if you kept everyone safe and calm -- no fighting in the halls -- and they were getting good grades, you were a good superintendent (One). Well, in Tennessee it was an elected position, and I think a lot of political payoff had to do with how they ran the school system. You know, they wanted to make decisions to get reelected. … in the past, you just wanted to keep the system going in the right direction, keep it funded. … [other things] were important, like the dress code and where you're going to build the next school and all that. (Five)

> [Then] the superintendent was manager. They managed the budget. They'd make sure operations ran. (Two)

> The old model of the business person – I think they have learned they can hire business professionals that can balance the budget. (Seven)

These four executives represented, in no particular order, 2 medium size rural districts, a large county system and a large city-county combined public schools.

Such comments about structural changes to the office might seem obvious for those who have observed Tennessee's transition from elected to appointed superintendents. But the ten men and women also pointed to the emergence of an "instructor-in-chief" role -- something that was not a natural occurrence but the result of the reform pressures that now shape public education. The comments included:

> When I became a principal I was basically handed the keys and said 'go and do good.' Probably about two-and-a-half years later I saw a job description for a principal . . . about the same time I was pushed toward becoming an instructional leader . . . . It wasn't anything about curriculum or about what's the best way to teach . . . now [as superintendent] the success of your schools is determined by those tests. . . . (Nine)

> I have also seen in the latter stages here [of NCLBA reforms] that the demand for people that know instruction and curriculum in the area of the superintendent has really increased. I think communities demand it anymore. (Seven)

> I think really the change is now as superintendent this board hired me to be the instructional leader. … the superintendent has to be in touch with what's happening academically in the building and the instructional needs of students to get kids college and career ready. So I think the role of the superintendent is to be the lead teacher for the school district. (Two)

Another superintendent explained the new role as a matter of being "an instructional conductor rather than a leader" because "while I don't tell where the train is going, I make sure it's on the right track and it's going on time" (Six).

Yet, while there was general agreement about changing roles, there was less uniformity about what was more important for success in these new roles -- visioning, ownership, collaboration, long-range planning, assessing and resourcing, etc. -- and advice-seeking tendencies seemed to reflect how these opinions figured in strategic decision making.

Advice seeking tendencies and performance

Generally, there were four observable tends in strategic advice seeking among the ten and these are BROADLY described for this discussion:

-- One group tended to isolate themselves from peers. Even if they interacted with board members and staff, their primary focus seemed to be individualism. They also gave the impression they held "fixed" views with little flexibility for handling differing information.

-- A second group showed a broad approach to advice seeking. They looked at their peers as a rich resource, coordinated with board members, and engaged staff not just in the central office but in respective school buildings. They also showed a willingness to review decisions in view of changing information or dimensions of the situation.

-- The third tendency was to seek input from consultants and outside experts. Internal staff members were included in discussions, not so much for input but to carry out responsibilities. Likewise, board members were kept informed, but more to achieve "buy in" as much as to seek input to shape the plan.

-- The last subgroup is unique in that the two subjects represent what possibly could become a growing segment among of superintendents with the graying of America, including its school executives. It includes a pair of superintendents who now top their peers in seniority and in large part have lost the peer group they once relied on for advice and to act as a sounding board for ideas; yet, they are both sought out for counsel.

Again, it is important to stress that these categories are general descriptions of observed behavior that includes some gleaning of attitudes and approaches from limited

interviews. In the end, the categories do not mean to convey exclusive sourcing in advice seeking, but to describe the apparent dominant tendency.

It does appear that these advice-seeking trends seem related to classroom performance.

However, in order to discuss performance in context of advice-seeking behavior it is important to point out some factors that cannot be figured into this analysis quantitatively but should be considered when assessing the face value of this information in context of the exploratory design of this research.

First, consideration should be given to the wholesale changes Tennessee recently made that dramatically changed its tests and threshold criteria: “Made a complete change of standards [in 2009], so we’ve gone from 46 or so in terms of difficulty of standards to second in the country. Only Massachusetts has higher standards now” (Ten). In essence, prior to 2009 student performance was referenced to 1998 state data. Now it is referenced to averages determined for 2009. Also, in 2009-2010 the state implemented new curriculum, assessment standards and graduation requirements -- and resulting data cannot be compared to testing conducted prior to 2009. So there is limited data to assess how advice-seeking tendencies have impacted this strategic decision-making area.

Second, it also is important to note the individual challenges or advantages some schools have with regard to others.

Two school districts in the study differed largely in ethnic composition from the counties of which they were part -- each more than 25 percentage points higher in ethnic composition than the population it served. This disproportionate representation has crucial performance implications given the disparity of scoring between non-White

(specifically the largest ethnic groups -- African American and Hispanic) and White students. For Tennessee, AYP Indicators for students in K-8 and 9-12 show that African American and Hispanic students score below the Basic level in Math and English by wide margins when compared to White students. Similarly, fewer students in these ethnic groups score at Proficient or Advanced levels in Math and English compared to White students.

Superintendents for both systems mentioned the heavy draw of private schools within their respective districts -- obliquely speaking about “white flight.” This phenomenon not only distorts the student makeup and impacts test scores within all classroom subgroups, but also drains community resources in context of parents who work within schools -- which involves leadership and other fungibles (personal and business contributions) as well as the intangible of “community backing” that is an important dynamic that critically impacts all areas of district operations. However, neither indicated “white flight” was insurmountable and neither seemed to develop a strategic plan to address it, and each expressed confidence that their strategic decisions would work. Both were in their first contract with their respective districts.

On the other hand, two city school systems had student populations who were notably less needy than the rest of Tennessee. These school systems both had fewer students by ratio -- by 15 percentage points each -- who received reduced-cost or free lunches than the rest of Tennessee. Moreover, 26 percent of students in one system paid non-resident tuition in order to attend its schools.

Isolation

The Isolation subgroup includes two females and a male. The districts of these three school executives varied in enrollment size and setting and included one with 300 to 2,999 students (rural), and two with 3,000 to 24,999 enrolled (one city/county combined and the other rural but growing).

Subject F. This school executive seemed to indicate part of her isolation was a factor of few female colleagues with whom to interact. “Well, when I first came I was part of a cohort of about a dozen new superintendents in Tennessee. But I didn’t have much in common with them, I was the only woman” (One).

However, when pressed, she also shared that she didn’t consult any colleagues outside of that cohort either.

Asked if she sought any peer’s inputs about strategic initiatives, she replied, “No. I don’t know that I talked as much to superintendents around me,” adding that most of the surrounding districts were much smaller, “really, really good to me” but not helpful (ibid.). “Or you’ve got Nashville and Chattanooga. They’ve got staffs to do it, so . . . you know what I mean. There is (NAME) at (NAME’S) County. It’s close to our size – so I’ve talked to him a little bit” (ibid.).

The one confidant she mentioned with any real enthusiasm in her tone was a member of the former superintendent’s staff who now was working on the faculty of an area university. She said he knew the school district inside and out.

Nonetheless, overall she seemed inclined toward isolation.

This superintendent said her primary strategic objective was to “reduce the number of interruptions in the entire process” (ibid.), explaining it in terms of differing

cultures found in each school. “Each time a child has to move to a new building there’s an adjustment … a new culture” she said. “And this interrupts the education process, causes a child to have to go through a new set of relationships to fit in, etc.” (ibid.).

This statement was backdropped against a discussion about a community meeting that took place the previous night regarding a school closure that this superintendent had proposed as part of this strategic initiative. This townhall gathering was described by a staff member who attended it as “over 200 people … a lot of emotion … no support” (*Brown -- *observations are coded for confidentiality). Moreover, the superintendent understood the implications of such large opposition. During a phone conversation with the board chair, the subject commented on the situation of a recent superintendent of one of Tennessee’s largest school systems, saying “a rezoning issue [school closures] caused his departure” (ibid.).

This was a one-day observation, so whatever happened during the days that followed the immediacy of the “crisis” wasn’t recorded for this study. However, throughout the day that was documented, not a single question was raised -- with staff or board members -- about whether this strategic initiative should be reconsidered in view of strong negative community reaction. On the other hand, the subject did ask for input about how to bolster the argument in favor of the standing decision.

Discussions generally were politically-focused or a matter of personal investment. There were discussions with staff members to find out what they knew about what was being said by the community at large and by leaders. There also were several phone calls with the board chair about how to respond. But there was no outreach to fellow superintendents.

There are a number of complexities about this situation that contribute to or otherwise reveal a unique texture for this particular situation (the superintendent's relationship with the board; ongoing race issues being addressed in court; disproportionate ethnic representation in the student population relative to the general population in the district, etc.). However, isolation with regard to advice-seeking on strategic decisions appears to be a critical contributing factor.

In hindsight, the most notable comment throughout the day was advice given by an immediate staff member, "stay the course . . . don't back down to opposition" (ibid.) -- affirmation that seemed to bolster the subject even in the face of an avalanche of information that suggested the superintendent and board should at least consider alternative actions.

This superintendent was 3.5 years into a first contract with the school district.

The Tennessee Department of Education (www.tn.gov/education/reportcard) reported that in 2010, 3rd through 8th graders in the system scored collective D's in Math, Reading/Language, Social Studies and Science (the state averages in these areas were C, C, B, and C, respectively), matching their level of achievement in 2009. Students in the 5th, 8th and 11th grades were graded at B, A, and A in the Writing portion of the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) -- a letter grade increase for 11th graders but no change for 5th and 8th graders. The state averages were A, A, and A. Ninth through 12th graders dropped scores in each area of Academic ACT Achievement compared to the previous year (Composite, 19.0 to 18.1; English, 18.8 to 17.5; Math, 18.8 to 18.0; Reading, 19.1 to 18.0; Science/Reasoning, 19.0 to 18.2). These scores also lagged the respective averages for the state (19.6, 19.4, 19.0, 19.9 and 19.6).

The Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS) provides longitudinal information to assess student progress over time. It is not an academic achievement test but a statistical analysis aimed at showing academic growth over time – essentially, a projection of how students will score on the 11th or 12th grade ACT. It is a tool that adds perspective to the actual Academic Achievement Grades; however, it is not intended to displace these objective criteria. The analysis develops a "predicted" score based on past performance and compares the actual or "observed" score to this value.

In Academic Growth (value-added measures -- which reflect the influence the school has on student performance), district Kindergarteners through 8th graders scored D, D and D in Math, Reading/Language and Social Studies (the same score for each of the three areas as last year) and an F in Science (a drop from the previous year). For 9th through 12th graders, despite the dismal actual test scores, statistical analysis indicated they scored better than predicted on Gateway/End of Course tests in Math (Algebra I), English (English II), English I, and U.S. History; but not detectably different (NDD) in Science (Biology I)). Eleventh grade Writing was graded "Above" predicted. Likewise, observed scores for 9th through 12th graders were "Above" for ACT projections as a Composite score and in English, Math and Science, but "NDD" in Reading.

That the high schoolers performed above predicted despite dropping in actual test scores is not easily understood. Taken literally it meant the prediction model expected them to score poorly, but more poorly than they did.

This subject's employment with this district ended June 2011 with the completion of her first contract.

Subject E. This administrator reported that her district had four construction projects that were the backbone of her school system's strategic plans and goals. When asked about the underlying principle for undertaking these building efforts, she offered that it was a long-range plan "actually put into place by a previous director and board about ten years ago" and added "we've sort of been following that strategy although we have had to modify it slightly in the past couple of years because of a couple of incidents that have happened" (Eight). A building scheduled for demolishment experienced a fire and was renovated instead of replaced.

"The overall strategic aim I have for K-8 is equity between schools – no matter what school a child in 5-8, they offer basically the same programs, services and educational model as they would regardless of where they lived" (ibid.).

Explaining further, she added, "We tended to have in this county open-enrollment … [and parents] would pick and choose what school they wanted to go to based on what they thought their child needed" (ibid.). She offered that she had been working for three years towards developing a plan for all of her schools so that she can say to any parent "no matter what school you go to in our county this same program is offered for your child" (ibid.).

She indicated the impact at one elementary school caused strong community resistance, at least initially, but she pressed through the controversy.

This superintendent previously had served on the central office staff of this district before taking a personal sabbatical and then becoming director of schools. The previous superintendent served his last year in a strained relationship with the board, but it is not known what relationship the incumbent had with the past superintendent.

This subject's tendency toward isolation was expressed during the interview, and hints of it were noticed during the observation, too (Green).

For instance, asked about her advice seeking tendencies, she described her relationship with the board and staff in terms of them receiving her ideas but not in terms of her seeking their actual inputs. "I think the board and I rely a lot on each other, we have a good working relationship so if I'm going to initiate a new strategic sort of operative for our system I always will run that by the board" (Eight).

> But I also have a good team, my central office team, a core of administrators who are my two assistant directors and the various supervisors that, in fact just before you called we just concluded a supervisor's meeting that we hold every month regularly just before the board meeting, so I can let them know these things are going to come out and be discussed at the board meeting. (ibid.)

In terms of advisers among other directors of schools, she gave a mixed message. "We have a regular meeting of school directors for the [REGION GROUP] and they are a great bunch of individuals who also operate their own systems and also have their own issues" (ibid.). But like the first subject, she pointed to dissimilarities with colleagues as the reason for her not to seek advice from these peers regarding strategic matters.

"The piece that is so different for me in [MY] County is if you tend to look at the counties surrounding [MY] County, they are so much smaller than I am. … so a lot of our issues are quite different from one district to the other" (ibid.).

She conceded that she had "basic conversations" with these local peers about "issues of snow days and things like that," but as far as implementing strategies for academics or new initiatives for a school system, they tend to look at me more than I look at them I think" (ibid.).

She did note there are some peers around the state with whom she could seek advice.

"Yes, there are about five directors across the state. So it's not a problem for me to pick up the phone and call them and get some feedback on issues and I do that frequently" (ibid.).

However, follow-up questions about school performance showed her practice was not to reach out personally to peers.

Asked whom she identified as her peer group regarding testing data, she named "the whole [REGION GROUP], I looked at about 12 districts that surround [MY] County and then I also looked at 10 districts across the state that were my size district with similar demographics" (ibid.). When pressed she pointed to "Two, because two were very similar to us demographically but had very different results, positive results" (ibid.). However, she confessed "I didn't talk to those because I didn't want to go there but was interested in those that had done better -- and I actually sent curriculum supervisors to two of those districts" (ibid.). She offered that her district was "in the process right now of implementing some changes that they had suggested that we do in getting ready to put that in place for next year" (ibid.).

The point is that she sent staff representatives to contact other staff at these school systems; however, she resisted going to meet with her peers in these districts.

This case presents some difficulties in understanding the impact of the subject's advice-seeking tendencies with regard to strategic matters.

She was 3.5 years into her first contract.

Looking at the data from 2005 through 2007, the district exceeded state standards across the board for Academic Achievement Grades (3-8) and Academic ACT Achievement (9-12). Likewise, although value-added measures typically work against high-achieving schools (because there is not room for improvement when scoring at the top of the tests), this district still overwhelmingly bested and in a few cases met the state average in all grade levels during this time period.

In 2008, the district again excelled in testing, but experienced a dip somewhat in the value-added analyses (which likely reflects the expected inverse effect of scoring well on the actual tests).

The data for 2009 and 2010 cannot be compared to previous years because a new baseline was set in 2009. So looking at the two years separately, in 2009 the system's students in grades 3-8 scored B, B, and B in Academic Achievement Grades for Math, Reading/Language and Social Sciences (matching state averages) and an A in Science (which exceeded the state mark). In 2010, these grades were maintained except in Science which dropped to the state average, B. In Writing, for both years 5^{th}, 8^{th} and 11^{th} graders achieved A's which was the norm for the state. Regarding Academic ACT Achievement, the system's secondary students (grades 9-12) lost ground from 2009 to 2010 as a whole, or Composite (22.0 to 20.6), and in each of English (21.7 to 19.9), Math (21.9 to 20.3), Reading (22.3 to 21.1) and Science/Reasoning (21.7 to 20.5). But in each case for both years, the scores were better than state averages (19.6, 19.4, 19.0, 19.9 and 19.6, respectively).

As might be expected with the drops in actual achievement, the value added measures (i.e. observed scores compared to predictions) were not favorable. From 2009

to 2010, the district's students in grades K-8 dropped in Math (D to F), Reading/ Language (C to D) and Science (C to D) but improved in Social Studies (D to C).

But, results for students in grades 9-12 were a mixed bag.

On Gateway/End of Course tests: "Above" the predicted value in Math (Algebra I); "Below" predicted in Science (Biology I) and English (English II), and "NDD" in English I and US history. On ACT analyses: "Above" predicted for the Composite score and in Math, Reading, Science/Reasoning, but "NDD" in English; 11th graders' status in Writing was noted as "NDD."

Importantly, the 2010 observed scores in each subject were all below their respective 3 year average of predicted scores even though the 3 year average of observed scores was above the 3 year average of predicted scores in each category.

This school system has a strong record of academic achievement, but the 2010 data might be showing the start of a drift. However, the subject exhibited leadership intangibles that set her apart from the other two subjects in this subgroup, and this observer would guess that any downward trend would be short-lived.

Subject J. This male subject was in his first year as head of his district. However, he had been a central office staff member for this district just prior to serving as superintendent in another district (for five years) before coming back to be director of schools. He identified *block scheduling* as a key strategic initiative for his district -- a discussion item during staff meeting on the morning of the observation (Yellow) -- but explained how this was not an end of itself, saying, "there's a couple of things that are kind of behind that" (Nine).

> [T]his year we've started … what is again a distance learning program like 8th grade Algebra I to five different sites. We learned very quickly that

> coordinating those schedules were very problematic because we're trying to deliver that instruction from the middle school here in town to four other sites, to groups of students, because we have an exceptional Math teacher at that school (ibid.).

He summed it up as "we're just trying to figure out how to most effectively [design] instruction to improve achievement" (in response to the district's state report card) (ibid.).

But distance learning was not an initiative he catalyzed.

"The distance learning grant was written a couple of years ago here by the staff, the current staff here and the supervisors," he said (ibid.).

His strategic decisions have included developing a system-wide literacy focus, pre-K through 5 system-wide; and building leadership capacity through a joint leadership academy developed with a neighboring county. Both initiatives had been undertaken less than six months when the observation and interview took place. Building leadership capacity is a key to how this director has shaped his approach for improving his schools – which is to force decision making and problem solving to the lowest level possible.

He explained the objective was "to develop more of a capacity of the building level principals to deal with those instructional kinds of issues from a leadership perspective" (ibid.). Basically he was hopeful the leadership academy would provide skill sets about how to sit down with teachers and review data. In the end he was looking for his principals to develop the "strategies and techniques that will make a difference in the achievement of the students" (ibid.).

Interestingly, he defined "strategic decision making" as "getting as many people to the table as possible to assess the need, whatever it might be in a school system"

(ibid.), and during the initial interview he gave an almost textbook boilerplate answer in terms of his advice-seeking tendencies when facing a strategic decision.

> I would depend on a leadership team that is comprised of supervisors in the office, principals at the building level, board members -- from a policy perspective. So those are all the different types of stakeholders. I would also seek advice from other, my peers, other directors that I've come to know and learn about, techniques and strategies and programs they've put in place. So I would depend on those folks as well through our regional study councils and state organizations. (ibid.)

He also named or generally referred to several active and retired directors of schools. However, in the follow up interview he gave a different answer (in terms of peers he would consult): "I remember us talking about that before and I don't recall if I had one or not" (ibid.).

Also, it was apparent he had not consulted his peers about the difficulties he perceived in making what works in one school also work elsewhere in a district.

> Even if you get a school turned around and you get it headed in the right direction and you start seeing positive results in terms of student achievement and all the other things that are involved, how do you replicate that in other locations from a district perspective? Because you know obviously you multiply the complexity of that process because you've got other communities and different structures in terms of schools and all of that, so how do you ratchet that up when you get a good thing going in one building to replicate that in multiple areas across the district, I think that's one of the big challenges. (ibid)

Looking at the possible impact of his advice seeking behavior, there is only a baseline score to reference (2009 was the rebasing of scores and criteria for the whole state, but 2010 will be the baseline for measuring the performance of schools during his tenure).

In Academic Achievement Grades (2010), 3rd through 8th graders in this district scored D, C, C and C in Math, Reading/Language, Social Studies and Science, compared

to the state averages of C, C, B and C. The 5th, 8th and 11th graders respectively scored A, A and B in Writing, while the Tennessee average was A across the board. In Academic ACT Achievement, district 9th through 12th graders garnered a Composite score of 17.8 compared to 19.6 for their state peers; and they fell short by comparison in the specific subject areas, too -- English (17.4 versus 19.4), Math (17.1 to 19.0), Reading (18.3 to 19.9) and Science/Reasoning (18.2 to 19.6).

In the value added measures of Academic Growth, this system's Kindergarten through 8th grade population scored D's in Math and Reading/Language (same results as 2009), improved to a C in Social Studies (up from a D), and dropped a letter grade to F in Science. The 9th through 12th grade group showed no pattern with regard to value added analysis. On Gateway/End of Course tests, observed scores dropped "Below" predicted values for Math (Algebra I), "Above" in Science (Biology I), "NDD" in English (English II), "Above" in English I, and "NDD" in U.S. History. Meanwhile on ACT measures, these same students performed "NDD" as a Composite as well as across the board in English, Math, Reading and Science/Reasoning. Any variances in 11th grade Writing were "NDD," too.

At the time of this study, the subject had been on duty only 6 months. The district's scores show the schools are *in extremis*. The strategic leadership he employs largely will determine whether they remain in the cellar or turn around.

Broad search

There are three subjects who displayed a tendency to seek input from a broad range of advisers, particularly peers (but not limited to "similars"). All were males and

they represented a spread of districts in terms of enrollment and setting – one with 300 to 2,999 enrolled (city) and two with 3,000 to 24,999 students (one rural, one city). As for tenure, one was in his first contract and had been on the job fewer than two years (and in his first superintendency), but the other two had at least ten years of tenure with their present school systems.

For the first two subjects in this subgroup, seniority seems to be a reflection of the strategic advice-seeking tendencies these leaders exhibited.

Subject H. The first of the subjects in this subgroup even remarked in this regard that a transition is in place because of "lot of retirements" (Four). He said that there is such a turnover rate in Tennessee now that "I'm one of the ones now that others come to" adding that "there's not that wise sage out there anymore [that I can go to]" (ibid). Moreover, he underscored the spot that put him in, saying, "I still want to ask people questions, too. Just because I've been in this more years doesn't mean I know it all" (ibid.).

He provided copious materials during the observation (Black) to provide insights into his leadership activities and the performance of his schools.

An indication of his advice-seeking tendency was revealed while discussing the strategic initiatives being planned for his schools. Like other districts, school construction and consolidation were being considered, including closure of a popular elementary school. The catalyst for his effort was a state initiative to create more pre-school classrooms. Such was deemed not possible with the district's current plant facilities -- causing this system's leaders to take a look at the district as a whole rather than in piecemeal.

> We just said 'Wait a minute; we don't need to deal with these individually. Just take a step back. Let's look at the whole system. Let's look 15 to 20 years down the road' -- which is what I should have done to start with to be honest with you and I just hadn't. So we did that. I called peer superintendents and had them come here. (Four)

He said he had already done a lot of analysis for them and had collated the data. He invited directors of schools from three districts "because I knew they were similar systems and they had also gone through some building programs and had experiences that were useful" (ibid.). During the visit he presented the data and conducted school visits, but he said he tried to keep the process "pretty open-ended" (ibid.).

The community served by the highly popular but small elementary school resisted any shutdown, and in the end the superintendent dropped this contentious element in order to move forward with the remainder of the strategic plan.

Documentation indicated he also consulted peers regarding state testing results, specifically TVAAS metrics. His schools consistently have scored among the highest in Tennessee, but have not fared as well on the value added analysis. He pointed out this disconnect, noting that the value-added assessment "is a secondary measure" but he made no excuse for the poor showing of his schools in this area (ibid.).

> We're asking these [peer] directors of schools [who are successful in achievement AND value-added] to tell us what they do, and the way they analyze their scores, also the things they've done to improve their value-added scores. We want to compare that to what we've done to see if there's something we're missing. Now what we think is we have so many high-performing students. We think we have so many students scoring advanced that that's why we're not getting the growth . . . . So it's trying to see if we're not looking at something the right way. (ibid.)

This district performed exceptionally well on the state standardized tests in 2009 and 2010, even with the transition to stricter tests and standards.

For Academic Achievement Grades, the district's elementary and middle school children (3rd through 8th grade) scored straight "A's" in all subject areas (both years) while their peers across the state averaged a C, C, B and C in Math, Reading/Language, Social Studies and Science. Fifth, 8th and 11th graders "aced" Writing, but this was average for Tennessee. High schoolers (9th through 12th grades) in the system did well in Academic ACT Achievement, with a Composite score of 22.0 compared to the state average of 19.6. They also bested the state average in English (21.8 to 19.4), Math (21.6 to 19.0), Reading (22.3 to 19.9) and Science/Reasoning (21.9 to 19.6). However, each score was a drop from the previous cycle (Composite, 22.8; English, 22.5; Math, 22.9; Reading, 23.0, Science/Reasoning, 22.3).

In Academic Growth (value added), scores for elementary and middle school students in the district were dismal, with a drop in two areas and a gain in one (2009 to 2010): Math, D to F; Reading/Language, D, both years; social studies, F to D; and science, D to F. The 9-12 group did not score detectably different from what was predicted on any portion of the Gateway/End of Course tests (Algebra I, Biology I, English II, English I and U.S. History). However, on ACT measures, these same students performed "Above" predicted thresholds as a Composite score, and in each subject area (Math, Reading, Social Studies and Science/Reasoning); and 11th graders were evaluated as "Above" in Writing.

What these value-added assessments seem to highlight is that the district's elementary and middle school students are excelling year to year, particularly in 2009, leaving little room for theoretical improvement on the value-added statistical analysis.

His senior high students consistently are high-achievers as well.

The drop in actual test scores (but still above state averages) produced "Above" predicted results in the value-added analysis. This tends to suggest the analysis model was shaped to anticipate schools scoring more closely to the state averages with the new tests, and this district's 9th through 12th graders beat the threshold.

This superintendent seemed genuinely focused on seeking advice from superintendents who appear to be doing things right in achievement tests and value-added assessments. His focus on finding other schools that are doing well in both areas bodes well for finding ways to improve in value-added analysis while maintaining success in the test-taking portion of their report card.

Subject A. The second subject in this advice-seeking tendency subgroup also is a long-tenured incumbent. Moreover, he made it a point to link his tenure and growth as a superintendent with his advice seeking behavior.

> I think the best way to characterize that is as I have grown in longevity here and spent more time in position, that network has grown. Certainly, as I have questions related to my work, related to planning, related to issues that perhaps I haven't faced, but I know others have, I am quick to use first my regional study council, which is [REGION] Superintendents. Second, I will go to T.O.S.S., which is the 136 Superintendents at large on a statewide basis. And then third, I will probably go to the State Department of Ed. That may sound just a little convoluted, but if I start with those whom I know the best and will know that they have had a solution that's worked for them, I find it's a little easier to get whatever approval authorization, if I have a track record that's been executed and successful somewhere else. (Six)

During the interview, as throughout the observation (Purple), he discussed strategic decision making in context of its *vector* aspects (magnitude and direction elements). He also talked about actionable considerations in strategic terms -- particularly with regard to an elementary school that was under construction. He mentioned population changes in the community, and the interaction of these changes with

programming, like pre-K offerings -- how housing patterns and the child-bearing population followed each other and that open space for residential development was a factor in locating the new school.

Regarding the strategic impact of the No Child Left Behind Act and Race To The Top requirements, he was critical of the forced nature of both. "[We] were told here are the set of rules, now do what you need to with your strategic planning," and he was skeptical that either fostered "viable and real strategic planning" (Six). However, he was expertly conversational about managing a solution within the parameters imposed on his district.

> We were on the targeted list on the most recent report card at two middle schools based on our scores in Math of our disaggregated subset of handicapped students. At both middle schools that's truly going to be a function of whether or not we approach an N of 45. So once that N exceeded 45 middle school special ed. population, our numbers are good. In our special ed. population they just don't approximate the threshold that was required at this year's plateau. (ibid.)

The impact of his strategic advice seeking combined with his focus on managing to strategic objectives was mixed in view of the district's performance on standardized tests.

For Academic Achievement Grades (2010), on average, 3rd through 8th grade students scored above their counterparts across the state in Math, Reading/Language and Science (all B's compared to all C's) and equaled them in social studies (C). These scores were consistent with 2009's results. Also, 5th, 8th, and 11th graders again met the state average of an A in writing. In Academic ACT Achievement, students' scores in grades 9 through 12 dropped from 2009 to 2010 as a Composite (22.2 to 21.2) and in English

(22.0 to 21.3), Math (22.7 to 21.2), Reading (21.9 to 20.9) and Science/Reasoning (21.9 to 20.7) -- but each of these scores beat state averages (19.6, 19.4, 19.0, 19.9 and 19.6).

The lower school students (K-8) stalled in value-added measures, dropping in Math (B to C), Reading/Language (C to D), and Science (D to F) but holding steady in Social Studies with a D. Their counterparts in high school scored fairly average on the Gateway/End of Course tests, achieving "Above" predicted for English I, but "NDD" for Math (Algebra I), Science (Biology I), English (English II) and U.S. History. However, on ACT measures, these same students performed "Above" predicted as a composite score, but also in each of English, Math, Reading and Science/Reasoning. Eleventh grade Writing was "Above" what was predicted as well.

It seems this district has an above-average achieving student population, with all student subgroups staying in range of previous test results despite the ratcheting up of difficulty in testing and assessment criteria. However, elementary and middle school students seemed to top out without maxing out. Meanwhile, like an earlier case, high schoolers scored above ACT value-added predictions across the board despite dropping on Academic ACT Achievement scores in the same areas. Again this seems to point to anticipation built into the analysis model that scores would more closely approximate the state averages with the new testing regime -- and likewise this district's 9^{th} through 12^{th} graders beat the threshold.

This superintendent had keen insights about the data and expressed a strong focus on managing success in the classroom. His active engagement with a broad group of peers augurs favorably that he will seek good input that will positively shape his strategic plan.

Subject I. The third member of this subgroup is a new superintendent in the second year of his first contract with the school district. He discussed advice seeking not just in terms of getting to a good decision, but also in terms of making sure that whatever strategic objectives were developed they also could be implemented successfully.

Moreover, as a new member of the community he pointed out the political aspect of advice seeking, identifying the outgoing superintendent as one person in whom he had particular confidence about strategic advice. “He brought me to Tennessee. He was transitioning out of the office and so I’ve relied on him a lot for advice, for learning about the political process” (Five). This adviser also introduced him to a local superintendent and other regional superintendents and he identified his “new directors” cohort in the state as “people I’ll call” (ibid.).

As for fleshing out any strategic plan, he has formed an informal cabinet of immediate staff that includes his supervisor of instruction, data analyst and Title I director among others. “Those are people that I bring together to the table that write the strategic plan. … And I listen to the board” (ibid.). He also emphasized that he works with the county commission, with a special effort to build a strong working relationship with the education chair.

A highly visible strategic initiative has been the construction of another school to add classroom space in the county. However, it was a plan developed 10 years earlier and he explained that he simply continued the push, allowing student population growth to make the case for the project.

During the day and also in the interview, he indicated something about his savvy in moving strategic initiatives ahead in the realities of sometimes competing

constituencies. He remarked that he had to spend $2 million in order to get $12 million for the construction project. In short, the county was offering to fund $12 million but they wanted part of the money to go toward upgrading a specific elementary school. He said that if he hadn't been willing to take care of that school, he would have lost support to get a new school in any other part of the county.

"So I had to take $2 million and put it into an existing school that it's debatable how much growth there's going to be out there, and then have $10 million" (ibid.).

So he effectively removed the obstacle of a controversy without letting it derail the overall capital improvement plan.

However, he said although he has spent time and effort on this pre-existing initiative, his key strategic focus was academic progress:

> The strategic initiative is to provide reading and instruction coaches and [to] provide technology coaches for teachers, ongoing professional development utilizing our federal monies for Title 1 monies and so forth, Title 2, and really focusing on student achievement. So if you asked me what is my primary focus, that's my primary focus. (ibid.)

During the observation period (Gray) this subject showed something of his academic focus while addressing an issue that arose during the day regarding the teacher coaching program that he identified as key to changing instruction in the classroom. Essentially, a problem with one of his master coaches came to a boil during the observation period.

This person was handpicked to teach other reading teachers and was a key player in his plan to improve reading scores. However, personality clashes were proving an obstacle in her coaching relationships, so he transferred her to head an administrative project that was important but more of an independent project that required minimal

interaction with others. In essence, he kept her productive and the academic initiative viable -- avoiding negative reaction from her that could have been destructive, but removing the source of negative feedback among the schools' reading teachers.

As an aside, this subject had the unusual political challenge of having an employee serve as chair of the school board. During the day he had multiple contacts with this person and it seemed that this person was using his position to push for favorable treatment in his area of the local education enterprise. The subject handled each engagement with professionalism and cooperation while not appearing to compromise the overall academic endeavor of the district.

The subject had only two years of district leadership at the time of the field observation -- an inadequate time to measure the possible impact of advice seeking behavior. However, the numbers show an opportunity for his strategic leadership to make a difference.

For two years prior to his arrival, 3rd through 8th graders in the county had scored consistently average compared to the state in Academic Achievement Grades. In the two years since (2009-2010), they have scored above the state average despite the more difficult tests and curricula (B's across the board compared to state peers' C, C, B and C in Math, Reading/ Language, Social Studies and Science) -- but there is room for improvement. For 2009 and 2010, 5th, 8th and 11th grades scored the state average in Writing (A's).

Meanwhile, county students in grades 9-12 dropped noticeably from 2009 to 2010 in Academic ACT Achievement in every area -- Composite, 20.5 to 18.9; English, 20.6 to

18.3; Math, 19.3 to 18.3; Reading, 21.2 to 19.2; Science/Reasoning, 20.4 to 19.0 (all below the respective state averages of 19.6, 19.4, 19.0, 19.9 and 19.6).

In Academic Growth (Value Added), K-8 students maintained D's in Reading/Language and Science from 2009-2010, but dropped from D to F in Math and climbed from D to C in Social Studies. In value-added analysis of Gateway/End of Course results, 9-12 students were noted as "NDD" in Math (Algebra I), Science (Biology I) English (English II) and U.S. History, and "Above" in English I. In ACT projections, students in 9th through 12th grades scored "Above" as a Composite score as the result of receiving "Above" in Math and Science/Reasoning and "NDD" in English and Reading; 11th grade Writing was rated "Below."

The value added scores seem to reflect that lower and middle school students performed above average in 2009 and 2010, but showed no change year to year.

On the other hand, high school students dropped in Academic ACT Achievement in every subject, falling below state averages, too – yet, value-added analysis (ACT) showed improvement. This appears to be another case of the prediction model expecting the district's students to score more poorly than they did -- but in this case despite scores trending upward prior to the new tests and standards.

Confer with Consultants

This next subgroup describes subjects who tend to confer with outside consultants about strategic matters. Like their colleagues in the other subgroups, the behavior does not suggest exclusion of other advice sources, just a perceived dominant tendency.

Although both shared a propensity for seeking advice from consultants and each was relatively new in their respective posts (about 1 year for one, and the other under 2 years), these two directors differed somewhat in other ways: age (40 years old; more than 60 years of age); systems previously served (one versus three), and the complexity of these districts (small and rural districts versus large unified school systems); education (master's in education; doctorate in education administration); and chief administrator experience (6 years inclusive; 21 years total).

Their school systems were fairly divergent in ways, too: setting (small rural compared to large urban); enrollment (fewer than 5,000; more than 25,000); and student ethnicity (Anglos composed 56 percent versus 33 percent). But both were fairly high in the number of students who receive free or reduced-cost lunches (83 percent for one and 72 percent for the other -- compared to 60 percent across the state).

Subject C. This first subject held a long view about strategic reform, but was realistic in terms of achieving results. He said that coming in he had been up front with his board that they were "looking at three to five years before we turn things around." But now one year into his contract, he seemed somewhat cautious even at that time range, saying that "a lot of times the reform that superintendents put in place, they don't see the results" (Two).

> We put a new administrative team in place, I reassigned some principals over the summer -- which you know in a large metro area that's easy to do, but in a small rural county … of course the school board was supportive … but we know for a principal to come in it's going to take one to two, well one year is really not enough time. (ibid)

He also had a broad view in terms of solution seeking.

He probably was the subject who mentioned the most advice sources by name from a wide variety of sources. All of the subjects in this study had boilerplate lists of advisers, typically comprising key staff, a local superintendent, a formal group (like a regional association of superintendents) and a general affiliation with the state superintendent organization. But at different points in the interview, Subject C spoke in such a way as to convey he really engaged all of the persons he named:

> [HIS NAME 1] who was superintendent of [HIS] County who was superintendent here, I speak with. Internally, my team, I learn as much from [HER NAME 1] and [HER NAME 2], from those folks, as I do from others. There's [HIS NAME 2], [HIS NAME 3], other superintendents who have been in it for a while. (ibid.)

> The Tennessee Organization of School Superintendents, that's a great organization and when we're together some of the best advice I get is not in the professional development settings but when we're sitting at a table having breakfast or lunch and I'll say hey we've got this going on, how have you done this. We troubleshoot and that's really good. Specifically for me when I went through the Beginning Superintendents Academy, the group of folks that came in together, there were three or four of us that came in together that we knew each other as principals or whatnot. We had developed a really close network and we're spread from middle to east to west Tennessee … so it's good to be able to pick up a phone and call a friend in [COUNTY] and say look [FRIEND] this is going on, what do you think. (ibid.)

What was unique about this subject was his earnest pursuit as well of "outside experts" – a formal "consultant" or "consulting firm," and another contact that would be considered essentially a consultant because of the nature of the relationship. It was from these two contacts that he obtained information that has primarily shaped his strategic plans for his county's schools.

> One of our industry folks, they are real involved with the Baldrige criteria with the Tennessee Center for Performance Excellence. One of the things our central office administrative team has been saying is that that's a tool that we can use to plan to answer the difficult questions about what's getting done or what's not getting done and how can we use it to really

> improve in all areas of the organization, all those strategic areas. We think that the Baldrige criteria is the way to go. It's some pretty lofty goals and we've got a long way to go but at least puts in place for us a process to ask the difficult questions to really take a good, do some good soul searching on where we are. (ibid.)

Likewise, he introduced himself to the school commissioner of another state in the same way one would seek the expertise of an outside consultant.

> I had the opportunity to hear the Education Commissioner of [STATE], and sat down and we talked. … his (former STATE) district was a 2008 Baldrige winner. His district was larger, but we faced some of the same challenges so that's the reason we were there. (ibid.)

But even with the lofty goals and dreams of achieving certification under the Baldrige criteria, this subject kept his focus on the fundamentals of his strategic plans. It was a consistent refrain throughout multiple sections of the interview and observable in the conduct of his routine during the formal observation (Red).

> Our vision is to get all schools to proficient with these new standards and then after we do that we will focus on this Baldrige criteria and try to do, you know, take it to the next level, so small steps. (Two)

> Teachers provide daily tests, quizzes and stuff in their classroom and use that, but I don't think we really look at these in terms of common standards. (ibid.)

> Right now it's to move all children to proficiency on state assessments, but not just the state assessments but with formative assessments -- specifically in our lower elementary, pushing all children to reading or near grade level by 3rd grade. You know that's our primary thing." (ibid.)

> TCAP is … reactive … an autopsy basically. You know teachers get that data in the summer and it's really too late to respond. We knew formative assessment was one of the ways we were going to improve academic achievement because teachers need to test kids based on standards and then take the data we get and make good, informed, instruction decisions to change practices or whatever needs to happen in the classroom." (ibid.)

In the end, his drive to find the formative assessment piece of the puzzle is what prompted this subject to seek these two outside sources and to decide to use a

commercially-developed program known as Discovery Education. He said it standardized what once was a haphazard activity "different from building to building" and that it is now the district's K-12 emphasis "to improve academic achievement -- because teachers need to test kids based on standards and then take the data we get and make good, informed, instruction decisions to change practices or whatever needs to happen in the classroom" (ibid).

This subject had about one year on the job when he participated in the present study.

The years prior to his arrival, 3rd through 8th graders in this district scored consistently below state averages in all four subject areas (all C's). However, 2006 to 2007, they improved to B's in Math and Reading/Language and maintained these in 2008. State averages for the three years were A's in both these subjects and B's in Social Studies and Science. In Writing during the same timeframe, 5th and 11th graders scored B's consistently (below the state average of A), but 8th graders improved from B to A to match the state average. Meanwhile on the ACT portion during these three years, 9th through 12th graders scored in a range from 0.6 to 2.0 points below the state averages as a Composite score, or for English, Math, Reading and Science/Reasoning.

In 2009 and 2010, the district's students did not respond well to the greater difficulties in state testing standards or in value-added measures.

Both years in Academic Achievement Grades elementary and middle school students scored D, C, D in Math, Reading/Language and Social Studies, but dropped from C to D in Science (compared to state averages of C, C, B and C in these subjects). In Writing, 5th graders earned B's each time (below their peers across the state), but 8th

and 11th graders met the Tennessee average of A's. On Academic ACT Achievement, 9th through 12th graders saw considerable drops in every category: Composite, 19.6 to 17.4; English, 19.5 to 16.8; Math, 18.9 to 16.9; Reading, 19.5 to 17.6; and Science/Reasoning, 19.7 to 17.8. Essentially, scores went from above or nearly at state averages to well below (in matching order: 19.6, 19.4, 19.0, 19.9 and 19.6).

During 2009-2010 value-added scores were similarly disappointing. In Academic Growth, lower and middle school students fell in Math (C to D), Reading/Language (B to D) and Science (C to D), but maintained a C in Social Studies. On Gateway/End of Course Exams, upper school students scored "NDD" in Math (Algebra I), Science (Biology I), English (English II) and U.S. History, and were "Below" in English I. On the ACT projections, the district's high school students scored "NDD" in Math and Science/Reasoning and "Below" for English and Reading which resulted in a "Below" as a Composite score. Eleventh graders were "NDD" in Writing.

This district is near or at rock bottom in performance. However, this subject is broadly searching for strategic answers with a keen focus on classroom interventions (albeit within a frame of lofty ambitions) that figures favorably for progress three to five years out as he has projected.

Subject G. While the previous subject consulted outside experts but also engaged peers and others for input, the next subject in this subgroup has used consultants in his present situation almost to the exclusion of other sources.

At the time of his participation in the research, this school executive had fewer than two years of tenure in the district, but more than two decades of experience as a director of schools. Heading up one of the larger Tennessee school systems, his schedule

reflected regular interaction with a wide spectrum of stakeholders in the community and the schools. The night prior to the field observation (White), he presided over a "teacher of the year" awards banquet with key teachers, education officials and politicians in attendance. The day of the research, he met with local African American ministers for a monthly morning discussion about community educational programs that assist the public schools. He met with key personnel (city staff, district teachers and by phone, a consultant from the Annenberg Foundation) for a briefing and discussion about a joint initiative between the city and the schools to improve education through teacher accession, succession and professional development. Later, he was a participant in a broadcast meeting with the mayor and other leaders regarding the district budget. Finally, he ended his day with a board meeting that concluded with an informal dinner with board members.

In between he met at various times on different issues with central office staff, board members and state education officials.

However, regarding advice seeking, he was fairly emphatic about his sources.

Asked if he had a cadre of superintendents that he used as a sounding board, he was to the point. "No" (Ten).

> I'm using a number of outside consultants that I've known and worked with over the years who are the best in the country in different areas … [NON-PROFIT] for school reform, … [NAME], a real systems planner and thinker … [we] "worked together" in [STATE], … (ibid.)

> We just went live with a complete restructuring of the business practices. I used a company out of [CITY], [STATE], [COMPANY], to develop a revision for our business practices, total revision of our business practices. …The nice thing about this company is they also develop the processes that you use. They also train your people. We did an organizational structure and then training. So we have completely transformed our business practices and it's operational now. (ibid.)

He also named a well-known program for leadership change started by [UNIVERSITY].

"I had been in that program at [UNVERISTY] for three years so, so I was pretty familiar with it and I modified it to fit the needs that we had here" (ibid.).

To his credit, he mentioned people within his organization -- executive staff and school Board members – as also helpful, but the impression received was these individuals were more useful for implementation than for development of the three- to five- year strategic reform plans.

> We have major reform initiatives going in nine different areas … based on what I knew about [DISTRICT] coming in, and then my own review of the data. (ibid.)

> [I looked at] the areas of low performance. Then I did my own analysis for the first about 100 days from of visiting a lot of schools and talking to a lot of people and gathering my own data about those process and operational kinds of things that weren't working well. I used the [NON-PROFIT] to do a meta-analysis of all the reports that have been written and conducted about the school system over the last five years -- for them to draw conclusions to find common concerns out of all the reports that had been made. …But I took all that information in the first 100 days and formulated our reform strategy. (ibid.)

The nine strategic initiative areas include educationally disadvantaged youth; students with special needs; English language learners; high school reform; middle school reform; information technology and use of data; strategic communications; central office organization; and human capital development. But like the other subject in this subgroup, strategic initiatives start with big view ideas that continue to narrow in order to focus keenly on what directly changes student performance.

> That drives everything we're doing, we have it all wrapped up in that [strategic initiatives]. I mean totally. (ibid.)

> We've structured the central office to outsource instructional leadership. We've moved people out of the central office into schools -- I believe very strongly in putting instructional leadership in schools as close to the classroom as you can get them. We've done that. We have 300 coaches in the school system now, instructional coaches that are all school based, they are in schools full time. And so now we just have to continue to look at it and to continue to grow it. We've got to focus on recruiting and keeping and supporting the best teachers, and that's sort of what we're after now. (ibid.)

Prior to his hiring, in 2007 and 2008 this district's 3rd through 8th graders saw improvement in Academic Achievement Grades in Math (C to B) and Reading/Language (C to B) but held steady with D's in Social Studies and Science (compared to state averages of A, A, B, B). Fifth graders raised their Writing score from a B to an A to join 8th and 11th graders who had maintained their previous A (the state average for all three age groups). On the Academic ACT Achievement portion of the assessments (2008), older students (9-12) netted a 19.1 as a Composite score, with individual subject scores of 19.0 in English, 18.4 in Math, 19.4 in Reading and 19.1 in Science/Reasoning. These compared favorably with the scores from 2007 but were below the 2008 state averages of 20.7, 20.8, 19.9, 21.1 and 20.3.

In 2010, students in grades 3-8 maintained their 2009 Academic Achievement Grades, scoring D's compared to their peers (across the state) who, on average, scored C, C, B, and C corresponding to Math, Reading/Language, Social Studies and Science. Writing was a highlight with the district's 5th, 8th and 11th graders earning A's to remain on par with their fellow students in Tennessee. In Academic ACT Achievement, freshmen through seniors dropped in the Composite score from 19.0 to 18.1 corresponding to drops in English, 18.8 to 17.6, Math, 18.3 to 17.7, Reading, 19.1 to 18.3

and Science/Reasoning 19.1 to 18.5 -- each below the related state average (19.6, 19.4, 19.0, 19.9 and 19.6).

Regarding Academic Growth (Value Added) for 2010, K-8 students dropped in three areas and held steady in one (Math, C to D; Reading/Language, C to D; Social Studies, C; Science, C to D). In Gateway/End of Course exams, pupils in grades 9-12 performed "Above" predicted in Math (Algebra I), but "Below" in Science (Biology), English (English II), English I and U.S. History. But they did much better in ACT projections, scoring "Above" in English, Math, Reading and Science/Reasoning, resulting is a Composite score of "Above," as well. Eleventh graders' observed score in Writing was "Above" predicted, too.

Like every other school district, there are a number of external and internal variables at play that together exhibit pressures against the forces brought to bear through strategic reform. However, this subject has developed an exceptional network of strategic advisers and consulting connections that offer remarkable resources for addressing the foreboding challenges that have been working against academic progress by this district for decades.

He emphasized that his strategic initiatives were developed as three- to five- year plans. But he thinks reforms have gained some traction and "over the next two or three years we'll see if we produce" (ibid.).

Other

This last subgroup is a special case that might have the potential to become the rule rather than the exception. These two subjects indicated they have always been

proponents and users of peer advisers throughout their administrator careers. However, both have passed the average retirement age, consequently many peers whom they previously used as advisers have preceded them into retirement. With the huge number of retirements estimated for the next decade, many more long-tenured superintendents will find themselves in similar situations.

The two subjects were males, both in their 60's, who led largely rural districts of mostly Anglo students. Their districts differed in enrollment (fewer than 3,000 students compared to more than 5,000 students) and affluence (56 percent of students of one received free or reduced-cost lunches compared to 77 percent of students of the other -- as opposed to 60 percent of students in the state). Both were experienced administrators (18 years and 30 years as superintendents) -- one with 10 years on the job at his district and the other at the 2.5 year point in his first contract with his present schools.

Subject B. The first subject in this subgroup expressed a practical view of strategic initiatives, especially in terms of the mandates wrought by the No Child Left Behind Act and Race To The Top participation -- describing both as creating "mandates we can't afford, without new money" (Three). It seemed that for him strategic issues were simply numbers that needed to be plugged into a management formula.

Typical of his comments about strategic initiatives, he said the raw facts for his district are that "the budget is on my mind and it bleeds over into everything that I do" adding at another point that "budgeting is pretty much the bulk of my strategic planning" (ibid.). During the observation (Orange), the conversation was on how to make up the hole that was being left by the lack of further ARRA money (temporary or stimulus funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act) and the looming stagnation or loss

in BEP funding (regular state funding for the Basic Education Program). But he was pragmatic in his frustration. “I’ve got to deal with it. I don’t have a choice but stress strategic initiatives, they have to be priorities. The budget has made a wreck of things. It’s impacting all strategic objectives in a negative fashion” (Three).

This subject would be considered an elder statesman by many superintendents. He has served as both an elected superintendent (eight years) and an appointed one (ten years), and he has held office in the state organization of superintendents.

Also he was one of the founding members of a group of superintendents who formed a lobbying partnership to represent the interests of small districts with state legislators and the Tennessee Department of Education. It was this group that he pointed to as his primary source for advice seeking. But he lamented that most of them were gone now. The impression was that he no longer asks advice from his peers. However, during the day he shared about teaching for multiple higher education programs around the state. While talking about entering grades and related matters for courses he taught, he explained that this was a way that he stayed in touch with what is happening in other school systems -- that it “allows me to learn from other superintendents across the state” (ibid.).

In this regard, this subject differs from the others in this subgroup. The others actively engaged other superintendents on particular strategic decisions – contacting them for specific advice on a given situation. This superintendent appears to have done this in the past, but now takes a more oblique approach, picking the brains of other superintendents in the course of engaging them during higher education programs and related contacts.

During the interview, he shared that in times past his schools have done well, but acknowledged that there might be bumps with the new state tests and criteria. “As long as I’ve been here, we’ve gotten all A’s and all B’s. Last year they changed the grading, but we’re trying to fall in line with the state’s move toward new standards” (ibid.).

Looking at the data for 2005 -2008, his district was fairly successful, with students in grades 3-8 meeting or beating state averages on standardized tests, and 9th through 12th graders staying about on par with state averages on the ACT assessment.

From 2009-2010, students in 3rd through 8th grades continued to do well, improving in Social Studies (B to A – with a state average of B) and staying above the state norm in Math, Reading/Language and Science (A, B and A compared to C, C and C). However, the district’s 9th through 12th graders did not fare as well on the Academic ACT Achievement assessments. Scores dropped noticeably from 2009 to 2010 -- Composite, 20.5 to 18.7; English, 20.4 to 18.0; Math, 19.7 to 18.2; Reading, 20.8 to 19.4; and Science/Reasoning, 20.7 to 18.7 -- falling below the state average in each area (in order: 19.6, 19.4, 19.0, 19.9, 19.6). In Writing, 5th, 8th and 11th graders scored A’s to keep pace with the state average at each level.

On value-added assessments, younger students (K-8) performed up and down on portions of the measures, but on average held steady. In Academic Growth they maintained B’s in Math and Science; rose from a B to an A in Social Studies; and dropped from a B to a C in Reading/Language. On Gateway/End of Course exams students (9-12) mostly were down from the previous year: “NND” from predicted in Math (Algebra I); “Below” in Science (Biology); “NDD” in English (English II); “Above” in English I; and “Below” in U.S. History. On ACT projections, students in

grades 9-12 were assessed as “NDD” in Reading but their observed score was “Below” predicted as a Composite, reflecting their “Below” in each of English, Math and Science/Reasoning. There was “no detectable difference” by 11th graders on the Writing portion.

In a nutshell, his K-8 programs appear to be producing solidly high-performing students -- even with the transition to the more difficult state tests; however, high school students have not adjusted as well.

Trying to get a handle on the impact of his advice seeking behavior is complicated by the fact that he has transitioned from previous tendencies. He still gets input, but it seems more a matter of passively absorbing ideas and examples rather than actively engaging superintendents about a specific district issue. Despite his “mining” for inputs with superintendents in the college programs he teaches, he seems to be trending toward isolation on strategic advice seeking.

The fact that he did not elaborate about his strategic initiatives other than to explain budgeting as his primary strategic planning activity also may mean trouble ahead.

However, there was evidence that he was seeking some specific input in the process of developing his plans.

During the field study he showed his innovation in overcoming some of the constraints of being a small, rural district. During the morning-long meeting with staff, it was apparent he had organized his building supervisors to supplement his central office staff as a de facto cabinet. Importantly, they showed themselves to be a sharp group with determination – and he indicated he respected and trusted their inputs.

Subject D. The last subject in this subgroup, and overall, has an experience profile similar to Subject B. At the time of his participation in this study he had accrued nearly 30 years of administrative experience in 5 school systems across the U.S. In fact, he previously served as director of schools at another district also included in this study. It was this high level of administrator experience that shaped his approach to advice seeking.

His answers were not identical between the initial and follow-up interviews, so in assessing his inputs it's important to point out how he differed from one to the other.

In the follow up, when asked to describe his advice seeking network, he first gave a typical boilerplate response, saying, "Probably the Superintendents Council, and we have a regional study council of Superintendents -- I think there are probably 20 plus" (Seven). But he continued his comments with statements that were more direct.

> Not to be smug, because all of us can learn, but the reality is with the amount of years that I've been a superintendent there may be one or two people that have similar depth of experience. And so as far as how … I may depend on them for regional issues and cultural context, but as far as strategic planning of educational issues, I have a pretty narrow set of people. Remember that I've had … five superintendencies across [STATE 1], [STATE 2], [STATE 3], [STATE 4] and [STATE 5]. (ibid.)

On the day of the observation (Blue), he named his "chief of staff" as someone who already was on staff when he arrived and whom he felt possessed important institutional knowledge.

> Well my internal advisor is Dr. [NAME]. She is one of the great resources for this system because she has worked for the [STATE AGENCY]. And she has a bigger playing field. Just like I have those five school systems across the nation, she has all of them across the region in Tennessee. So she knows more than just here. So I'm able to play ideas off her and this will also sound smug, and she has a doctorate degree and she is used to that rigor that comes from that program, and so that's a person. … When I

> talk with her it's about initiatives she knows about, it's things I know about. (ibid.)

Regarding others, he mentioned "mentors across the United States whether they now are retired superintendents or they are college professors or they industry leaders, that's the body that I turn to. He added that some are "in [UNIVERSITY] that I knew, faculty at the College of Ed. at [UNIVERSITY]. One has an expertise with low performing schools -- she came out of [STATE]" (ibid.).

He also named "a prior commissioner that I would turn to -- she's more of a political animal which is something that you have to be sometimes at that level and the governor is your boss. But she gives me some advice …" (ibid.).

So the overall impression received was that he was well-networked, but confident in his own abilities and favorably opinioned about his chief of staff. During the second question and answer session he solidified this perspective about his tendencies when asked about bouncing his initial plan off various sounding boards. Basically, he described a process of getting "buy in" rather than seeking authentic input.

> It's one thing for me to believe I know what's best for everybody. It's another thing to create -- and it slows it down and it makes it seem for me frustrating at times -- have others to go through that acquisition of those same shared values. So you begin to roll it out at school board meetings. You roll it out at your -- we call it -- central office staff meeting (that's all your department heads). You begin to roll it out to community groups so that you can begin to elicit support from parents. You include -- I learned to include -- the media, even if at times they would be critical of some of the ideas. They begin to be part of the process of dissemination of information. (ibid.)

He also showed resistance to input when questioned about modifying his plans.

> Let me say this about modification, and I will say this. There is a reason that I'm hired as the leader, and I'm going to espouse those things that I believe in. And I'm going to be, and I think it's good that people test you on them, because it's through that that substantive ideas begin to get their

> metal or tempered. But the modification that occurs in my mind may occur in the implementation time frame. I would hope they don't occur in the substance behind it -- if it's a strategic initiative. (ibid.)

This subject easily could have fit into the first subgroup of subjects who isolated themselves from bona fide insights from peers. However, the difference maker is that two of the three in that classification were in their first position as a superintendent and this subject is highly experienced and networked – and indicated he once relied on the advice of peers. Moreover, he gave the impression that he was highly dependent on the advice of his chief of staff, not only in his interview remarks but also throughout the routine of the day he was observed. Multiple times during different events he commented positively about her abilities or his confidence in her with regard to decisions at various levels. His remarks did not seem gratuitous or inappropriate relationship-wise, but it seemed unusual given his exceptional record of administrative experience and his pride in it.

The main strategic thrust for this district was a five-year plan developed by the subject that included reforms aimed at student achievement, technology and facilities. He offered that it was not a template from any previous job, although he opined that there seems to be a "tendency to do that," to bring something from somewhere else and "impose" it in the new situation (ibid.).

He said he created a strategic plan based on what he knew coming into this district – "that this system was really low performing, the data tells you that. I knew the data before I came in here" (ibid.).

Outlining the three areas of the five-year plan, he shared that:

> The initial strategic initiative is student achievement -- not just reacting to the tests, because we've learned even this year that the tests, and what they are measuring, changed, but it's in the longer term view of the importance of learning and the importance of -- I think -- critical thinking for students.

> …. And what do you do to create a system that can support that so that it just doesn't become people dependent. (ibid.)
>
> The second big one is in the area of technology. When you are a rural system you are disconnected. There are a lot of factors why -- probably one of them is the financial base of rural communities or rural school systems. A second is we don't have all of the wires and pipes and channels and all that that make high-speed interconnectivity a possibility. And so that's our second one is the how we level the playing field for opportunities using technology so that our kids can be in the same field that Nashville/Davidson County is -- and you can do it through technology. It just takes a little while and it takes some prioritization of budgeting to get some of that accomplished. (ibid.)
>
> Our third one is rural systems are plagued, well and so are urban, by decaying facilities. That third initiative was to get both the county commission and the school board and those that are politicians … aligned so that we think in terms of capital and quit short-changing the budget in areas of maintenance, because each time you defer that you add to the decay and the rapidity of the decay. (ibid.)

Elaborating about efforts to improve student achievement he added that the initiative included measurable benchmarks that allowed him to monitor progress throughout the year rather than learn the level of student performance after the fact.

"When we go into the spring TCAP test, our progress no longer will be a guess; that we hope our kids did well" (ibid.). He said now his team would know which students were on the borderline and who was far from the mark, giving him a planning tool for how and where to effectively infuse additional resources. "We'll have essentially taken the guess work out of how our students are going to perform" (ibid.).

As an aside, he mentioned an issue shared by at least four other subjects in this study.

"School closures are political dynamite up here, but they're a reality. I've learned to say "let's do an assessment" and "let's consider steps that may allow us to be more efficient" (ibid.).

Finally, prior to the new assessments this district had two high schools that were in line for state takeover and an elementary that was a target school. Providing context for his present situation, the subject explained that at his previous school system there were 21 schools with 8 on the target list, but "when I left, all 21 were in good standing" (ibid.).

He added that "From that standpoint I know how to do that part" (ibid.).

Prior to his arrival (2006-2008), the district's students had shown modest improvement on state assessments, although they remained below state thresholds in both Academic Achievement Grades (3-8) and Academic ACT Achievement (9-12).

In 2010, lower school students showed improvement in one area from 2009, but remained below state standards in the other three. Their counterparts in high school declined across the board to rest firmly below state standards. In Academic Achievement Grades (3-8), students raised their group score in Math to a C, but kept a D in each of Reading/Language, Social Studies and Science against the state averages of C, C, B and C, respectively. In Writing, "A" was the state standard at each student level -- district 5th, 8th and 11th graders scored B, A and B year to year. In Academic ACT Achievement (9-12), the system's students fell in each subject area, dropping in the Composite score, 19.1 to 17.8 as a result of lower scores in English, 19.0 to 17.8; Math, 17.5 to 17.1; Reading, 19.9 to 18.2; and Science/Reasoning, 19.4 to 17.8. By contrast, across Tennessee, the average scores were 19.6, 19.4, 19.0, 19.9 and 19.6.

On top of this disappointing performance, there were few bright spots in value-added measures. In Academic Growth (Value Added), K-8 pupils improved from a D to a C in Math; maintained a C in Reading/Language and a D in Social Studies; and dropped from a D to an F in Science. On Gateway/End of Course exams, grades 9-12 performed

"NDD" predicted in Math (Algebra I) and Science (Biology), "Above" in English (English II), "Below" in English I and "NDD" in U.S. History. They largely experienced a slide in ACT projections, scoring "NDD" in English and "Below" in Math, Reading and Science/Reasoning for a Composite score of "Below" as well. Eleventh graders' observed score was "NDD" from predicted in Writing.

Although this subject noted his success at his previous school district, news reports indicate he spent his last year there in controversy, serving out his contract in the classroom and not as director of schools. Late in 2010 both he and his chief of staff separated from this school district amid controversy.

Summary of advice-seeking tendencies

The catalyst for this exploratory study came from researchers McDonald and Westphal (2003) who looked at how advice networks affected CEOs' strategic decision making. They proposed that these captains of industry looked to reduce uncertainty about their decision making by relying on the advice of others who were "like" them. Essentially, they hypothesized that CEOs confided in friends or with top managers who were similar in functional backgrounds (finance, operations, etc.) or industries (automotive, banking, etc.) and proposed that this tendency had a profound effect on company performance. They found that "advice seeking from friends and similar others generally has negative effects on subsequent firm performance (lagged by three or four years) … while advice seeking from acquaintances and dissimilar others generally has positive effects on these variables" (p. 22), concluding that "the results show poorly performing firms are less likely to improve and more likely to get worse" (ibid.).

Essentially they proved that successful firms were led by CEOs who looked for genuine input from a broad base of advice givers that included “dissimilars” and not simply an affirmation of their ideas by friends or close cohorts. Conversely, poorly performing companies had CEOs who had narrow advice networks.

Before proceeding, there are some provisos that should inform the reading of the summary statements about advice seeking that are expressed in the next several pages:

-- First, these are presented with the obvious consideration that in any given scenario, a chief executive may come up with the right strategic decision on his or her own, or within a limited group of confidants or confidantes. However, such exceptions would prove the rule. Moreover, McDonald and Westphal would seem to suggest that over time the odds work against isolation or insular advice-seeking behavior.

-- Likewise, there is a lag time between strategic decisions and the effect on performance (in the range of three to four years). This presents some difficulty in assessing the performance impact of advice seeking by the present research group because seven of ten subjects are in their first contracts with their school boards with an average of 2.07 years on the job.

-- Additionally, Tennessee changed testing and graduation standards during the course of this study, essentially leaving a baseline and a single data point on which to make a conclusion about possible trends.

Even so, there appears to be enough information within the observations, interviews and report cards to suggest plausible connections between their advice seeking and school performance -- with the purpose of contributing to the launching of future research.

Statement 1

Superintendents were like their CEO counterparts in showing a natural or general preference for "similar others" when seeking strategic advice. However, where business leaders identified function and industry as key factors in strategic advice seeking, superintendents typically mentioned common district size (or complexity) and setting, and similar school demographics (including regional factors) as keys to identifying strategic advisers.

Even superintendents who tended toward isolation named at least one similar peer with whom he or she had at least minimal contact. On the other extreme, one of the subjects who preferred consultants to the near exclusion of other superintendents, nevertheless, explained his choice of advisers in terms of his prior experience as one of them.

Ironically, the search for similar others was based on common demographics but also on dissimilar results -- better results than the school system of the superintendent initiating advice-seeking contact -- which implies the seeking superintendent was looking for a different strategic approach than what he or she had implemented.

Statement 2

One key contrast with the referent study was the subgroup of executives who largely isolated themselves from others. Subject F was the most extreme, rejecting neighboring superintendents because they represented "little tiny districts," but also dismissing possible help from larger districts like Nashville and Chattanooga, saying, "They've got staffs to do it, so … you know what I mean?" Even when mentioning a

district “very close to our size,” she seemed to indicate she nonetheless had limited contact with its director, offering that “I’ve talked to him a little bit” (One). Likewise, she rejected formal attempts to build a circle of confiding peers on the basis of gender differences. “Well, when I first came I was part of a cohort of about a dozen new superintendents in Tennessee. But I didn’t have much in common with them. I was the only woman” (ibid.).

But Subjects E and J showed similar signs of insular behavior – a phenomenon described by Paul C. Nutt (2001b) in terms of a limited search for answers. Essentially, this advice-seeking strategy results in adopting “pet ideas” and “makes the conspicuous solution seem timely and pragmatic” (Table 3, p. 8). Nutt observed that “Calling for an innovative (new to the organization) -- let alone radically innovative (new to the industry) idea is difficult, if not impossible, under such conditions” (p. 11).

These three subjects seemed to exhibit this exact tendency, and the bottom line is that the performance by their respective schools could be in peril, given that Nutt (1999) concluded that “studies of 356 decisions in medium to large organizations in the U.S. and Canada” reveal that “half the decisions in organizations fail” and pointed to the tendency to “limit the search for alternatives” as a prime cause (p. 75).

Statement 3

The two subjects identified in the Other category would appear to be the other 20 percent of decision makers from the ten in this study who would be among the half (when added to the three in the Isolation subgroup) who according to Nutt are in danger of making failed decisions because of limited searches for alternatives.

The reason for categorizing them apart from the Isolation subgroup is due to the unique nature of their isolation behavior. Both specifically stated they did not consult other superintendents because they had reached such seniority as administrators that other superintendents looked to them for advice. But each also stressed that they previously relied on peers for counsel about specific initiatives, but retirements had depleted the ranks of those they had always trusted.

Another reason to address these two subjects differently than those in the Isolation subgroup is to point out the potential for their ranks to grow rapidly in coming years. Subject H unintentionally hinted at this possibility when he mentioned the transition that is taking place with the aging of the ranks of superintendents. He said that with the number of retirements taking place, he's "one of the ones now that others come to" adding that "there's not that wise sage out there anymore [that I can go to]" (Four). However, unlike the two Other subjects, he underscored that he still wanted to ask people questions.

If closing in on retirement causes superintendents to depart from seeking advice from others (because their advisers have retired), the huge turnover that is anticipated in the next few years could be traumatic for Tennessee schools -- and doubly so, because junior directors of schools will have a decreasing pool of senior experience to rely upon, too.

Statement 4

In a report prepared for the Task Force on Developing Research in Educational Leadership of the American Educational research Association, Kenneth Leithwood and

Carolyn Riehl (2003) reported that "To learn well, students need access to high-quality instruction and a well-crafted curriculum. After that, they benefit most of all from the positive effects of strong school leadership" (p. 4). The link is that that good leadership provides the conditions and resources that result in the placement or development of good teachers in the classroom and the creation or availability of an effective curriculum that helps students succeed.

Although a value judgment, it is apparent that the broad search tendency of the five remaining subjects in this study has led them to alight upon common (and likely successful) strategic objectives that focus principally on these two classroom variables that affect student performance – the teacher and the curriculum. That is not to say that they have only these two objectives as their respective strategic initiatives. However, generally, each indicated that all other reforms were designed to support these two.

In this way, Subjects A, H and I in the Broad Search subgroup, are like Subjects C and G in the Confer with Consultants category. The difference being that the first came to this emphasis as a result of an open search among peers and the second through broadly seeking input with an emphasis on consultants. Yet the broad search approach, although applied in different spheres of contacts, led both subgroups to identify the same emphases in their strategic initiatives.

To be fair, Subject D in the Other subgroup made similar emphases.

However, it appears that his arriving at this conclusion was in spite of his tendency to "single-source" his advice seeking. As prefaced earlier, in any given situation the right strategic decision might be arrived at with a limited search. But in the long run, such behavior likely will be crippling to the leader.

Statement 5

As might be expected, predictions about future school performance follow the logic expressed in the four preceding statements. With all other variables held constant across the collection of school systems represented in the sample group, and barring changes in the strategic decision making tendencies of the subjects, this observer expects schools led by subjects in the Broad Search and Confer with Consultants subgroups to improve in academic achievement within a three- to four-year period. Conversely, stagnant or declining school performance is the expectation for the districts of executives exhibiting limited strategic advice seeking behavior as represented by the Isolation and Other subgroups.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

> Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.
> Solomon (Proverbs 15:22, New International Version)

This research was undertaken to explore what changes if any have taken place in the behavior of superintendents since the age of strategic reform has emerged. Looking at the daily routines of ten subjects, this study confirmed many findings of the first such time-on-activity studies conducted nearly 30 years earlier, but also revealed some differences that reflect the influence of the present reform environment. Likewise, triangulation of individual interviews against the respective recorded observation, as well as among the remaining nine subjects' data sets (of interviews and observations), uncovered a strategic imperative that seems a driving force in long range and day-to-day decision making -- and as a medium for study, this strategic focus reveals a potential relationship between patterns of advice seeking and performance.

Summary of conclusions

Time-on-activity

Like the original time-on-activity studies, a large portion of superintendent activity could be classified as brief, varied and fragmented. However, even seemingly disparate actions appeared to be intentionally shaped by each subject to influence the contribution of different events to effect a common end. Moreover, unlike the

impressions left by the subsequent studies catalyzed by Mintzberg's work, superintendents were not *responding* to conditions of brevity, variety and fragmentation, but actually *managing* in such a way as to create this type of work flow. In essence, the subjects were creating "synchrony" (Smircich, 1985, p. 257) or "generating a point of reference, against which a feeling of organization and direction can emerge" (p. 258).

This perception is reinforced by the fact that so much of the subjects' time involved face-to-face interactions, and so many of these one-on-one events occurred in the superintendents' offices.

Importantly, what distinguished the time-on-activity portion of this study from the older studies was the finding about the amount of time subjects spent on strategic matters. By a large margin, participants in the present research engaged more in strategy behavior than their peers from 30 years ago -- except for a group of Canadian administrators in Alberta. But the discovery of a monograph produced by the teacher association of that region explained the conditions then in terms of accountability and budgetary influences that approximate the context of the education environment in the U.S. today.

Interviews

This finding about strategy behavior confirmed this observer's interpretation of recent survey responses by superintendents (who named *strategic planning* and *systemic thinking* as needing greater priority in the various professional development tracks) and intuition about the impact of the age of strategic reform on superintendents' work experiences. In this regard, there seemed similarities to the strategic conditions caused by the globalization of markets in the corporate world, and because of typical comparisons

between school executives and CEOs, this observer hypothesized that superintendents would act similarly to the CEOs in McDonald's and Westphal's (2003) *referent* study about strategic advice-seeking behavior.

These researchers reasoned that CEOs of highly performing firms conducted broad searches for authentic input in order to develop strategic plans. Conversely they hypothesized (and confirmed) that poorly performing firms would become more entrenched in their strategic direction because of limited searches or insular behavior -- defined by greater interaction with friends or similar others (who presumably would affirm rather than challenge existing beliefs).

While the findings of the *focal* study appear to affirm these relationships between advice-seeking tendencies and performance, there was an important difference with regard to what was discovered about insular behavior. Essentially, superintendents who seemed to prefer limited searches for alternatives chose isolation (no real challenges or input) over seeking affirmation (i.e. insulating themselves within an advice group of friends and similar others). Yet, the outcome likely will be the same in view of Nutt's research (1999) showing the relationship between failure and attempts to "limit the search for alternatives" (p. 75). The net effect will be the adoption of "pet ideas" over better ones or the implementation of the first obvious solution because it seems "timely and pragmatic" (Nutt, 2001b, Table 3, p. 8).

Guiding questions

When the sum of the research is considered, it is possible to give an informed response to the primary questions that guided this research effort in place of hypotheses.

However, in place of any lengthy analysis, the question and answer format below favors a pithy encapsulation of the findings presented elsewhere in this write-up.

(1) *Has the ongoing and increasing pressure for meeting targets for school reform altered the role and the function of superintendent, and if so, how?*

It is evident from the results of the time-on-activity observations as well as the actual words of the subjects that superintendents are strategically focused even in daily activities. Moreover, these superintendents also mentioned how increased state and federal accountability measures had led to the emergence of a "lead instructor" role, requiring them to show expertise in curriculum design and teacher development as well as diagnosing and fixing student performance. Importantly, even when the NCLBA "matures" in 2014, or if states receive short-term waivers recently offered by the federal government, the culture of strategic reform and the anticipation that the superintendent will be the "lead instructor" for schools likely will continue to be influences due to enduring expectations that have been created.

(2) *Do superintendents define "strategic" in terms of magnitude and direction -- or is their use of the word simply another way for them to convey the concept of "important"?*

Several superintendents clearly expressed an understanding of the concept of strategic decision making in terms of its systemic dimensions and not just as a synonym for "important" or "a deft political move." Others preferred to focus on characteristics key to implementing strategic reforms, conveying the ideas of "collaboration" or "ownership," or constructs of duration such as "long range." However, all of the subjects

showed in a practical sense that they understood the implications of strategic decisions in terms of a system-wide choice about the direction of a school district.

(3) *Are professional associations and university programs failing to keep up with the changes that practitioners are experiencing in the field? Do superintendents even think to use universities or groups like AASA as resources for responding to strategic change?*

Generally, subjects in this study spoke positively about regional and state professional associations. Although none mentioned AASA by name, it was evident they considered such organizations important. Also, at least two subjects referred to university faculty or related programs as having particular expertise in leading strategic change.

Only one subject specifically stated that she had had no formal training about strategic planning "that I can remember in all of my education" (Eight). She has both a doctorate and an Education Specialist degree and although she was well-versed about many elements of strategic thinking, she nevertheless emphasized that "there was a great need" among superintendents for such training (ibid.). Her experience seems to relate to the responses on the mid-decade AASA survey which identified "strategic planning" and "systemic thinking" as the two most pressing needs in professional training (Glass & Franceschini, 2007, p. 53).

Observations and conversations seemed to show a fairly even split among the ten subjects in terms of who had a more formal understanding of strategic planning and systemic thinking (six) and who had a less developed grasp of the terms and concepts (four).

(4) *Whom do superintendents consult about strategic matters? Considering the poorly performing firms in the referent study, is there the possibility that school districts will experience an ever-tightening negative spiral because leaders seek others who will affirm their beliefs rather than someone who possibly will offer challenges? Could it be a contributing factor?*

Essentially there were four clearly identifiable advice-seeking tendencies -- categorized as Isolation, Broad Search, Outside Consultants and Other. But generally these revealed two basic decision-making behaviors. Subjects preferred either to limit searches for alternatives (Isolation and Other), or, showed a desire to gather as much information as possible from a number of diverse sources (Broad Search and Outside Consultants).

There are only two data points on Tennessee's NCLB report cards and additional study is needed to track the relationships between performance and advice seeking. However, if the referent study's findings about CEOs hold true for superintendents, one can project trouble for at least half the districts in the focal study (except that isolation poses the threat).

(5) *How has the new strategic environment impacted what superintendents do and how they do what they do? If there have been changes, what are they and what was the catalyst for change? Do superintendents still tend to meet with the elites of various constituencies? Has the basic nature of personal interaction changed?*

Largely, superintendents' behavior confirmed the findings of time-on-activity studies conducted three decades ago. But the brief, varied and fragmented nature of the subjects' days was found to be a product of managing the work flow and not a factor

driving superintendent work. Personal contact continued to dominate day-to-day activity (still largely one-to-one communication). There were individual instances of high level of contact with "elites" instead of with the general bodies of constituents, but on face value it makes sense that superintendents maximize their time by dealing with school and community leaders. However, it was too coincidental that so many subjects scheduled the day of observation on a day of a major monthly meeting. An expanded span of observation is needed before drawing conclusions about contacts with elites. In any case, it is possible to state with confidence that superintendents used every contact to further either short-term or strategic aims.

(6) *Has the commonality of strategic reform created a more universal role and function among superintendents regardless of size and setting of the school system?*

Superintendents certainly attribute differences in district size and setting as important considerations in making comparisons among school systems. Also, they generally recognize smaller districts have fewer resources compared to larger ones. But on two important points this study found universal application. The age of reform has made the education environment more strategic in focus. Also, a new role or expectation has emerged for directors of schools, and at least for the foreseeable future the top district administrator will need to add "instructional leader" to the list of functions already in place. Additionally, observations made during the course of this research effort confirmed perceptions reported by Hoyle, et al. (2005) that superintendents of districts comprising all sizes and settings think their jobs are similar to CEOs in the private sector, and that they lack sufficient training relating to their COE role (p. ix). Only one large

urban district was included in this study. So follow-on research should examine whether -- in the NCLB environment -- large urban districts still attempt 2-3 reforms per year (and how many are political distractions compared to genuine strategic efforts).

(7) *Is the superintendency headed the same direction as collegiate coaching, which is more and more shaped by demands for immediate results -- a situation that is detrimental to implementation of long term strategies?*

In hindsight, this question was constructed to invite a subjective response outside the scope of this research effort. Since the start of this research, two subjects have left the school systems they were serving. But the situations surrounding each departure were complex and merit more consideration than simply pointing to either to make a case in this regard. However, the time lag for seeing results from strategic change should be a focus in future studies.

Four recommendations

Recommendation 1: *Pioneer a movement to study strategic decision making as a new field of inquiry in education administration.*

> Leadership has significant effects on student learning, second only to the effects of the quality of curriculum and teacher instruction.
>
> Kenneth A. Leithwood & Carolyn Riehl (2003, p.4)

Tennessee superintendents were invited to participate in this study to help "launch a new field of inquiry" in education administration that examines the impact of strategic decision making on the overall conduct and success of public education (elementary and secondary schools). The findings that have been articulated in this study serve to

emphasize the need for a major focus in this sphere of research, especially in view of how leadership decisions impact classroom performance.

Researchers argue that leadership effects are mostly indirect -- based on "large-scale quantitative studies of schooling" that essentially measure leadership as an indirect influence factor (ibid.). Even so, these quantitative studies found that leadership explains "about three to five percent of the variation in student learning across schools," but also "this effect is actually nearly one-quarter of the total effect of all school factors" (ibid.). Only the teacher and the curriculum have more impact on student performance. But the superintendent's influence on both largely determines the impact of each. In view of the present age of strategic reform, pioneering the study of strategic decision making should be a priority.

Finally, there is an irony in the fact that few theories about managerial behavior have originated out of the study of educational administration. Indeed, most studies about educational leadership use applications of military, political or business dictums or principles to look at superintendents and principals. Yet, most military, government and business leaders have been shaped (directly and indirectly) by the leadership of these same educators.

Recommendation 2: *Re-emphasize field work (e.g. in situ observations and elite interviews) in future research efforts about superintendents and strategic decision making.*

> Most recent work in management and leadership research addresses 'why' questions, seeking to explain and or predict manager, subordinate, or organization behavior. In comparison with other types of managerial research, relatively few descriptive studies focus in on "what" and "how" questions have been undertaken.
>
> Lars L. Larson, Robert S. Bussom and William M. Vicars (1981, p. 4)

While seeking relevant bodies of literature to provide a proper orientation to the issues in this study, this observer was struck by the relatively low number of studies based on extended field work. Most articles contained extensive correlational computations using survey information and others had write-ups about experiments (typically conducted with college students as subjects). Little of the literature was based on actual observations of a targeted population in the natural environment to which the behavior in question would apply. It seemed much of the work was quick to develop explanations and predictions before having any experience with or exposure to (other than theoretically) the population and behavior they were seeking to explain and predict.

A recent example (outside the field of education) helps illustrate these concerns.

In March 2010 many popular journals and newspapers ran headlines touting the findings of a study published in the prestigious *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (Frey, Savage & Torgler, 2010). Using statistical analysis, the researchers made a compelling argument that the relatively short time it took the Lusitania to sink (less than 20 minutes) compared to the Titanic (almost 3 hours) caused a strong survival instinct among male passengers, making men disregard the social norm of "women and children first" and resulting in more men surviving the Lusitania tragedy and fewer women and children. Major media outlets ran write-ups heralding the news about what was described as "selfish rationality" based on the face value of the authors' findings (e.g. Bhanoo, 2010; Kluger, 2010).

Unfortunately, the statistical proof s belied the indisputable facts of the historical record.

Lusitania survivors actually testified that generally there was not widespread panic, but orderliness, and that passengers and crew had helped women and children into lifeboats on the order of the ship's master (captain of the ship). Regrettably, this order was countermanded by the staff captain (second in command) and the women and children were removed from the lifeboats and ushered into a nearby salon where they presumably drowned as the ship sank minutes later. The staff captain also had ordered counter-flooding of tanks to "right" the ship, which only accelerated its demise, but not before he emptied the lifeboats. Hence, leadership blunders caused the inordinate number of deaths among women and children -- not "selfish rationality" (see Bigham, 1915a-o).

Despite having "combed through Titanic and Lusitania data to gather the age, gender and ticket class for every passenger aboard, as well as the number of family members traveling with them … who survived and who didn't" (Kluger, 2010), the researchers missed the testimony of survivors that was documented in the same repository of data -- likely because they were looking to explain the *why* through their statistical research design.

What this example suggests is that the researchers tried to explain the *why* without first establishing the facts of *what* and *how* took place.

A secondary action related to this recommendation is that formal procedures should be standardized for conducting time-on-activity studies and related ethnographic efforts.

This researcher relied heavily on guidelines developed by Larson et al. (1981). These were adequate but by no means exhaustive (see Appendix B, Appendix C and Appendix D), and it became apparent there must have been discussion among the several

observers in that study to resolve issues not addressed in their published classification and data coding protocols. If field work becomes an emphasis again in education administration research, an opportunity emerges to grab a leadership role in producing more detailed materials that could be positioned as the standard to use in research about education administration.

About 30 years ago, Larson et al. (1981) lamented the "emphasis on explanations and predictions," citing McCall, Morrison and Hannan (1978) to make the point that "many of the problems with existing approaches to leadership and management can be traced to a superficial understanding of what and how" (p. 3). For a number of reasons this description of research largely still holds true about education administration.

Now strategic reform has created unique leadership conditions, and these should be exhaustively chronicled for the purpose of developing theorems as well as recording best and worst practices in order to promote the health and growth of education as well as contribute to the general advancement of leadership studies.

Recommendation 3: *Develop appropriate certification requirements for superintendents that include formal study of strategic planning and systemic thinking, as well as periodic refresher training about these and related decision-making behaviors.*

> From a practical standpoint, the challenge for strategists, who must labor within the confines of flawed perceptions, is minimizing the gap between these flawed perceptions and the reality of their 'environment.'
>
> Linda Smircich (1985, p. 726)

It should be no surprise to educators that learning is an important strategy for minimizing gaps between expectations, or perceptions, and reality.

Interestingly, in the present context, only one of the ten subjects specifically mentioned the lack of formal equipping about *strategic planning* or *systemic thinking*: "I

have not had any really specific training that I can remember in all of my education so I would say there is a great need there" (Eight). However, it's reasonable to conclude that the ten subjects are representative of the larger population of superintendents who reported that these two constructs need greater emphasis in professional development training. In that survey, about four in ten (39.1 percent) named *strategic planning* as needing special attention and about half (45.4 percent) said the same about *systemic thinking* (Glass & Franceschini 2007, p. 53).

Ideally, research resulting from implementation of Recommendation 1 would be useful in implementing this recommendation. Longitudinal findings, case studies, best and worst practices as well as other lessons learned would be integrated into higher education courses as well as provide material for inclusion in professional development modules for in-service type training or similar continuous education programs.

Glass (2006) has proposed a hierarchy of management essentials that should be taught based on the size of a school district and attending constraints on staffing. This observer does not disagree with this practical approach -- but in combination with and not to the exclusion of the proposals contained in Recommendations 1 and 2.

Glass feels only superintendents of the top 1 to 2 percent of districts in size experience conditions that approximate what CEOs do (p. 2). To be sure there are differences in leadership and management practices that are driven by organizational size. But Glass misses an important point in proposing how to deal with such realities. Despite his contention, superintendents are saying that regardless of district size, the complexities of the job are perceived as on par with what CEOs experience in the private sector (Hoyle, Bjork, Collier & Glass, 2005, p. ix). Thus equipping all superintendents in such

areas as *strategic planning* and *systemic thinking* is a practical necessity equal to the management essentials he proposes.

Recommendation 4: *Intentionally create opportunities for fostering mentor-type relationships for new and struggling superintendents.*

> Judgments about decision making are extremely difficult because each instance of administrative behavior is an intricate mix of complex variables.
>
> Theodore J. Kowalski (1995, p. 71).

Already the Tennessee Organization of School Superintendents operates a New Directors Academy which forms new superintendents in Tennessee into peer cohorts (designed to be informal groups which new superintendents could turn to for finding a sounding board for ideas or to discuss problems). Four subjects in the study named these cohorts as an option for consulting about strategic matters. However, none mentioned this experience as offering a connection to mentors (senior school administrators) in the state. The irony is that while the cohorts might offer "safe space" for newcomer-to-newcomer openness, this practice could foster the very insular behavior in strategic advice seeking that this professional organization should be working to extinguish.

T.O.S.S. would be the ideal group to establish a mentoring program or at least to introduce new superintendents to seasoned directors who already have shown success in the face of challenges created by *an intricate mix of complex variables*. This would be an opportunity to spotlight the best practices of superintendents from districts of various sizes, differing geography and diverse student population demographics … and include ethnic and female exemplars.

Only one of the two female subjects specifically mentioned gender as a factor in advice seeking, but it did seem to be a consideration for both. There were no ethnic subjects in the study, but it is easy to conclude from the literature that the pursuit of *similar others* would include ethnicity as a factor. The point is that the possibility of isolation because of gender and ethnic factors is not a risk that should be tolerated and T.O.S.S. could take the lead in taking steps to avoid this trap.

Moreover, in general there should not be so much of a *hit or miss* element to learning about the success of others, or to find out what works and does not. So it would seem fostering contact with the best of the state should be a high priority.

APPENDIX A

Interview guiding questions

1. When facing a unique situation, whom do you seek for advice?

2. Do you seek the advice of other superintendents? Who? Why?

3. Define “strategic decision.” Give examples. Can you describe the dimensions that make a decision “strategic?”

4. In response to the AASA mid-decade survey superintendents named *strategic planning* and *systemic thinking* as the two greatest training needs. What has contributed to this development?

5. State and federal education reforms represent strategic change. Were you a superintendent when the NCLBA passed? If so, what were your first steps to develop a plan? Did you seek advice from other superintendents? If so, whom?

6. Did your advisers generally agree with you or did they recommend you modify your plan? How did you respond (accept or reject inputs, some or all)?

7. Were your first strategic plans successful? If not, did you change your plan? Did you change your advice source?

8. Are there other strategic initiatives you are pursuing? Whom did you seek for advice? Why?

9. Are expectations for superintendents different today than when you first entered education? How?

10. Do you have any final thoughts about the state of the superintendency in general, or about the strategic nature of the education environment?

APPENDIX B
(EXHIBIT 3 is excerpted from Larson, Bussom & Vicars, 1981, pp. 47-48)

EXHIBIT 3
The Mintzberg Classification System*

Managerial Activities

1. Desk work – Those periods when the manager worked alone, or with his secretaries, in the confines of his office writing letters, reading, processing mail, and scheduling activities.

2. Telephone calls – This category includes both in-coming and out-going calls.

3. Scheduled meetings – Those appointments that were on the day's appointment calendar at the beginning of the work day.

4. Unscheduled meetings – Those contacts that are hastily arranged or where someone just "drops in".

5. Tours – Those "promenades" taken by the manager to observe activities and/or to deliver information.

Purpose of Contacts

1. Nonmanagerial Work – Activities that are not directly connected with the requirements of the manager's job. Example: serving as a paid consultant to another organization.

2. Scheduling – Brief informal contacts for purposes of scheduling time.

3. Ceremony – Routine duties of a legal or social nature. Examples: presenting an award, speaking to a group of visitors, visiting an employee who is in the hospital, or attending a retirement dinner.

4. Status Requests – Inconsequential requests of the manager that are related to the manager's status position. Invitations to attend functions, to join a board, to contact someone, to see that a certain person gets some special attention.

5. Action Requests – These requests for some action on the part of the manager fall into four categories:

   A. Requests for authorization – approval of a new program, an exception to a policy, etc.

   B. Requests for information – specifically, current information to which the manager had access, such as: special plans, policies, costs, and personal opinions.

   C. Requests to initiate something – "Would you bring this up at the next staff meeting?" etc.

   D. Requests that attempt to influence – attempts to influence the manager with regard to pending or unresolved decisions, such as promotion or replacement of staff, etc.

6. Manager Requests – Contacts where the manager makes requests of others. These fall into three categories:

   A. Asking the subordinate for information: "Do you know anything about such and such?"

   B. A request of others to take action on an issue or idea. Delegation of a task.

   C. Manager follow-up requests. "Would you follow-up on this for me?"

7. Observational Tours – Situations where a manager leaves his office to greet someone in the hall or to see something of interest.

8. Receiving Information – Information that managers receive from others fall into three categories:

   A. Instant communication – very current information rushed to the manager by telephone or unscheduled meeting while it is still "hot". Most of this type of information takes the form of rumors, hearsay and opinion.

   B. Briefings – Presentation, usually at scheduled meetings, that update the manager on projects, situations, etc.

   C. Interviewing – The manager obtains information by interviewing others, by attending conferences, etc.

9. Giving Information – Contacts where the manager gives information to others. These sessions can be categories as follows:

   A. Instant communications given by the manager (see 8A).

   B. Information on plans and policies.

   C. Advice to others.

   D. Other – Miscellaneous comments about personal experiences, etc.

10. Review – Contact characterized by discussion of a wide range of issues and by a clear two-way process of information flow. Six types of review seem to recur:

    A. Deputy reviews – with close subordinates to discuss current and important issues and to find out "what's going on."

    B. Functional review – usually with a larger number of people at scheduled meetings. The purpose is to review one functional area of the organization's operations.

    C. Contact review – usually occurs in a social milieu, a chance meeting, where information is traded.

    D. New-man reviews – meeting with new, high ranking subordinates to clear up questions on procedures, etc.

    E. Post-meeting reviews – manager reviews with a subordinate the events of a meeting that both attended.

    F. Organizational board meetings – structured meeting that usually begin with reports, then move to old business, new business, etc.

11. Strategy – Contacts dealing with important organizational decisions, such as staffing, budgeting, new directions, etc.

12. Negotiations – Attempts to reach agreements between two organizations.

*Adapted from Mintzberg (1973).

APPENDIX C
(EXHIBIT 5 is excerpted from Larson, Bussom & Vicars, 1981, pp. 50)

EXHIBIT 5

EVENT CHARACTERISTIC CATEGORIES

Starting Time

Hours and minutes on the 24-hour clock

Duration

Elapsed time in minutes

Activity

Desk Work	Tour
Telephone call	Travel
Scheduled contact	Interaction with observer
Unscheduled contact	Personal time

Location

Superintendent's office
Subordinate's office (proximal to superintendent's office)
Other areas of the School system
Other administrative subordinates offices
Other locations outside of the school system

Purpose of Contact

Nonmanagerial work	Receiving information
Ceremony	Giving information
Scheduling	Review (& discussion)
Stature request (of subject)	Strategy
Action request (of subject)	Negotiation
Manager request (by subject)	Other or Unknown

EXHIBIT 5 (continued)

Titles of Participants

School Board members	Outsiders
Peers	Immediate subordinates
Principals	Assistant Principals
Teachers	Custodial, kitchen workers
Students	Parents

Form of Initiation

Clock
Subject
Opposite party
Mutual

APPENDIX D
(APPENDIX A is excerpted from Larson, Bussom & Vicars, 1981, pp. 74-79)

APPENDIX A

DATA CODING MANUAL

0.1* Time Studied is the time a subject spends on the job while being observed. Another way of describing it is "time at work," or the difference between starting and ending times minus lunch (unless it is a working lunch). Time Studied is calculated by summing its component activities:

Time Studied =	Tours +	
	Scheduled Meetings +	Contacts
	Unscheduled Meetings +	Activities
Work Time	Telephone Calls +	
(Business Activities)	Desk Work +	
	Travel +	Noncontact
	Personal +	Activities
	Observer Interaction +	

0.2 Work Time is the time a subject spends in business activities -- that is, Tours, Scheduled Meetings, Unscheduled Meetings, Telephone Calls, Desk Work, and Travel.

0.3 Self-Reported Activities are those which occur while the observer is away from the subject's area of work. For example, if the subject has a night meeting or some phone calls at home which it was impossible or inconvenient for the observer to be present at, the subject may keep track of the events and report them

* Note: Numbering corresponds to columns on the Chronology/Contact Sheet -- see #1 attachment.

the next day to the observer. These events are listed and recorded in the narratives, but they are not coded or counted in the "Time Studied."

1.0 A new activity begins when a change in participants or media occurs, unless the same activity is continued following an interruption. All contact activities are counted except instantaneous "hellos" and other similar greetings. In order for a noncontact activity to count, it must be at least one minute in duration. Each activity is tagged by it starting time.

1.1 Concurrent Activities occur when two or more activities take place at the same time, such as when the subject talks on the phone while traveling in his car. In this case, only the primary activity is coded (Telephone Call rather than Travel in this example). Priorities for Concurrent Activities are as follows: 1 = Tour; 2 = Scheduled Meetings; 3 = Unscheduled Meetings; 4 = Telephone Call; 5 = Desk Work; 6 = Travel; 7 = Personal; 8 = Observer Interaction.

2.0 The Duration of an activity is the difference between the starting and ending time appearing on a digital clock (no second hand). Contact activities that occur during the time which the digital minute indicator remains unchanged have zero duration; thus, it is possible for two or more activities to begin or end at the same recorded time.

2.1 An Interruption occurs whenever an activity is interrupted by another activity or activities and the prior activity is continued immediately following the interrupting activity or activities, provided the length of interruption is less than 30 minutes.

3.0 Activities are the eight basic categories of events. Four our contact activities (Tour, Scheduled Meetings, Unscheduled Meetings, and Telephone Calls), and the remaining four are noncontact activities.

3.1 Tours occur when the subject leaves his office to inspect or observe other parts of the organization. For Tours, the subject's office is defined as the immediate area where he, his secretaries, his staff, and his conference room are located, provided that these are contiguous with one another and on the same floor.

3.2 Scheduled Meetings refer to meetings by appointments that were made at least the day ahead. Thus, if a meeting is on the subject's calendar at the beginning of the day, it is considered to be Scheduled. Meetings which are put on the calendar the same day that they take place are coded as Unscheduled.

3.3 Unscheduled Meetings refer to nonscheduled meetings, as when someone just drops in. In order to be a contact, the subject must talk to or listen to the person. For example, if someone enters the subject's office and then leaves without any exchange of words, there is no contact.

3.4 Telephone Calls refer to incoming or outgoing telephone calls, intercom calls, and two-way radio conversations.

3.41 Outgoing Telephone Calls resulting in no answer, busy signal, wrong number, or person not being in the office all count as Desk Work.

3.42 Incoming Telephone Calls which are wrong numbers count as Desk Work; those from a secretary are also Desk Work.

3.43 Strictly personal phone calls are coded as Personal.

3.44 Duration of a Telephone Calls does not include a time when a subject waits on hold, which is Desk Work. Telephone Calls begin when the subject contacts the party called.

3.5 Desk Work refers to periods of time when the subject works alone or with his secretary or a specified person who is acting in a secretarial role.

3.51 Working alone includes such things as: sorting and processing mail, reading and writing reports, preparing a tape-recorded message, replying to correspondence, signing letters, and writing speeches.

3.52 Working with a secretary includes: exchanging papers, receiving and sorting mail, giving dictation, signing forms and letters, reviewing calendar, and discussions regarding phone calls and other business matters. All business interactions between the subject and his secretary will count as Desk Work. Other people who can serve in a secretarial role shall be identified separately for each observation site.

3.6 Travel occurs when the subject leaves his office (as defined in Section 3.0, Tours) to go directly to another location to conduct any other business activities. Travel can also occur between sites of business activities and on return trips to the office.

3.7 Personal is a nonbusiness activity which is included in Time Studied but not coded as to purpose.

3.71 Personal time consists of visits to the coffee machine, water fountain, or restroom. It also consists of non-business related desk work, such as reading strictly personal material, writing personal letters or notes, or balancing one's personal checkbook. It also includes nonorganizational contacts of a nonbusiness nature, such as conversations with wife or family, one's personal attorney, doctor, personal friends, etc.

3.72 All contacts with organizational personnel, whether of a business nature or not, are handled as business activities.

3.8 Observer Interaction takes place when the subject and the observer talk. Concurrent explanations of ongoing activities, as when the subject explains what the forms are that he is signing, are neglected (i.e., consistent with section 1.1, this would be classified as Desk Work).

4.0 Purpose of a contact activity is determined by one of the 13 categories used by Mintzberg (see pages 249-257 in The Nature of Managerial Work), except that "External Board Work" is dropped and "Other" is added as a purpose category (see #2 attachment).

4.1 When more than one purpose can be attributed to a contact activity, the purpose, which in the coder's judgment is most important, is the only one coded.

5.0 Number of Participants of any face-to-face contact activity is the number of persons a subject comes in contact with. Whenever someone joins or leaves a contact already in progress, a new activity occurs unless the person is deemed to have arrived late or left early. The size of the group is recorded as the maximum number of people present during the contact.

6.0 Participants are classified according to their organizational title: for example, principal, business manager, board member, citizen, student, mayor, parent, etc.

6.1 Participants who act in a capacity not typical of their usual role are coded according to their regular organizational position, except those predetermined at any site to have secretarial role capabilities.

7.0 Form of Initiation refers to the person who initiated any contact activity.

7.1 There are four forms of initiation:

Self is initiation of the contact activity by the subject.

Opposite is initiation of the contact activity by other parties.

Mutual is where the initiator is undetermined.

Clock is a regularly occurring Scheduled Meeting.

7.2 For purposes of coding, previous contacts are ignored. For example, if a subject returns a Telephone Calls in response to an earlier phone call initiated by the other party, the subject is now the initiator.

8.0 Location of an activity can be: the subject's office, a subordinate's office which is proximal to the subject's office, other areas of the subject's organization, or other locations. For purpose of Location, the subject's office includes only the room or area in which his desk is located.

8.1 When a subject has more than one office at different locations, both count as the "subject's office."

8.2 When an activity is split between two locations, count only the one location where the majority of time was spent. In an open office situation, where the subject may converse from his office to someone in another office without either party moving, the location of the subject should be coded.

9.0 Observer Presence or exclusion during the activity is coded. Certain activities may require exclusion of the observer.

10.0 Continued Activities (see section 2.1) are tagged by their time of prior occurrence.

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW CODES

One	Interview conducted with Subject F on November 20, 2009 (in person).
Two	Interview conducted with Subject C on December 3, 2009 (in person), supplemented with follow up exchange on March 3, 2010 (phone).
Three	Interview conducted with Subject B on December 8, 2009 (in person).
Four	Interview conducted with Subject H on November 23, 2009 (in person).
Five	Interview conducted with Subject I on January 29, 2010 (phone), approximately two weeks after observations were completed.
Six	Interview conducted with Subject A on December 7, 2009 (in person), supplemented with follow up exchange on February 24, 2010 (phone).
Seven	Interview conducted with Subject D on December 1, 2009 (in person), supplemented with follow up exchange on February 24, 2010 (phone).
Eight	Interview conducted with Subject E on December 10, 2009 (in person), supplemented with follow up exchange on March 1, 2010.
Nine	Interview conducted with Subject J on November 30, 2009 (in person), supplemented with follow up exchange on February 25, 2010.
Ten	Interview conducted with Subject G on June 8, 2010 (phone), approximately two months after observations were completed.

APPENDIX F

FIELD OBSERVATION CODES

Black Field observations of Subject H, totaling 8 hours and 36 minutes, conducted on November 23, 2009.

Blue Field observations of Subject D, totaling 7 hours and 45 minutes, conducted on December 1, 2009.

Brown Field observations of Subject F, totaling 9 hours and 35 minutes, conducted on November 20, 2009.

Gray Field observations of Subject I, totaling 9 hours and 30 minutes, conducted on January 14, 2010.

Green Field observations of Subject E, totaling 8 hours and 42 minutes, conducted on December 10, 2009.

Orange Field observations of Subject B, totaling 8 hours and 45 minutes, conducted on December 8, 2009.

Purple Field observations of Subject A, totaling 9 hours and 20 minutes, conducted on December 7, 2009.

Red Field observations of Subject C, totaling 8 hours and 30 minutes, conducted on December 3, 2009.

White Field observations of Subject G, totaling 7 hours and 50 minutes, conducted on April 13, 2010.

Yellow Field observations of Subject J, totaling hours and minutes, conducted on November 30, 2009.

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