THE ROLE OF SUPERINTENDENT'S TENURE ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT
IN SELECTED SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN NEW YORK STATE

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine if there was a relationship between superintendent's tenure in his/her current school district, and student achievement as determined by scores of level three and four, on the eighth grade New York State (NYS) standardized assessments in English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics. Data were gathered from public records retrieved from the New York State Education (NYSED) website. The study focused on small city school districts in New York State, as defined in NYSED Law, as school districts that have less than one hundred twenty-five thousand inhabitants, based on the latest federal census (NYSASCSD, 2010). This quantitative study explored superintendent's perceived levels of implementation of initiatives/practices, based on the *Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium*, (ISLLC) in current school districts (Green, 2009). Lastly, the study examined the demographics of superintendents in the 57 small city school districts across New York State. Of the 57 superintendents, 39 completed a survey (69% return rate) that addressed their perception of the level of implementation of practices/initiatives in their districts as well as demographics pertaining to individual district leaders. Cronbach's alpha indicated the instrument was reliable. A summated rating scale, using factor analysis, was run to establish component analysis which yielded three components of superintendent's perceived level of implementation of practices/initiatives in their school districts: (a) Leader Scale, (b) School and Community, and (c) Resources. A data reduction process produced a scaled version of the School Leadership Practice Survey (SLPS) as two

questions loaded across the board and were extracted from the scale as the 18 other questions were used. A correlation was run using superintendent's demography as the independent variable and student achievement remained the dependent variable. Finally, regression was run for research question four using mean scores on NYS ELA and Mathematics assessments as the dependent variables, and the summated rating scales from research question two, as well as demographic information as independent variables.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

There has never, in the history of education, been such intense scrutiny of public schools and educators as in the past decade. Federal and state policy makers have tagged public education as inadequate compared to other countries and the need to educate all students, of varying abilities and disabilities, to a high level of standard has never been greater. Federal and state policy makers have imposed major mandates on local school systems. In 1983 the National Commission on Excellence in Education submitted *A Nation at Risk* to Secretary of Education, Terrell Bell, and for the next quarter of a century, a spotlight on education would shine (National Commission on Excellence in Education [NCEE], 1983). Educators were clearly stung by the recommendations contained within *A Nation at Risk*, stating that teachers knew content: however they lacked the insight to be psychologists, counselors, policemen, diplomats, disciplinarians, referees, entertainers, and magicians, simultaneously (Fernandez, 1985). *A Nation at Risk* was a call to arms for all educators and although the financial piece of this reform was not prescriptive, there were financial incentives from the federal government based upon student achievement (NCEE, 1983). During the years of *A Nation at Risk*, district leadership was about managing budgets, buildings and successful relationships with the neighboring community. Curriculum development was about selecting the right textbook series and if parents and students were happy, the school district was considered a success (Hunt, 2008). The document contained recommendations addressing *Leadership in Fiscal Support,* which targeted the difference between management and leadership (Hunt, 2008).

A substantial movement that evolved from *A Nation at Risk* and heavily

standards based, was *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB), which was signed by

President Bush in January, 2002 (No Child Left Behind [NCLB] Act, 2002). In the

1980's the typical administrator's role began to transform as the era of *No Child Left

Behind* began to emerge. That began the standards movement which probably had

the most profound impact on administrators. Administrators' focus had to shift from

management to instructional leadership, with a focus on the building level, teacher

activities and most importantly, student achievement (Hunt, 2008). The overall

requirements of NCLB, stated that 100% of the nation's public school students were

(at minimum) to meet, if not exceed, academic standards by the year 2014. The way

in which states met the standards was a similar process which allowed some

flexibility in pacing. Successfully achieving the standards meant that districts had to

achieve Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Sanctions were tied to schools that did not

make AYP and each year a district failed to meet AYP, the sanctions became more

severe (NCLB Act, 2002). The signing of NCLB in 2002 began a laser-like focus on

how well individual students and groups of students were able to perform

academically. In the past eight years, achievement focus has been narrowed

significantly to those areas in which students were tested under NCLB for purposes

of determining whether school districts were making AYP. A recent study of school

districts that failed to make AYP for two or more consecutive years showed that, in an

overwhelming fashion, the focus of both school improvement efforts and staff

development initiatives were being targeted towards language arts and

mathematics (Hunt, 2006).

Leadership research in school districts posed the question whether or not there were direct links between a district leader's behaviors (initiatives/practices), background demographics and the academic performance of the district as a whole (Alexander & Griffin, 1976; Byrd, 2001; Hart & Ogawa, 1987; Johnson, 1997). According to Marzano and Waters, district leadership had a positive impact on student achievement. Contrary to the opinion that district leadership may not have a relationship to student achievement, Marzano and Waters' findings suggested that direct leadership had a "measureable effect on student achievement," (2009, p. 12). In an attempt to determine the influence of district leaders on student achievement, and the characteristics of effective superintendents, Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) conducted a meta-analysis of research on the influence of superintendents on student achievement (Waters & Marzano, 2006). Their research examined findings from 27 studies conducted from 1970 through 2005 that used quantitative methods as a measurement of influence. Waters and Marzano concluded that a statistically significant relationship existed between district leadership and student achievement. Effective superintendents concentrated on creating districts that focused on goal setting as an avenue to student success. The authors' findings concluded that superintendent tenure was positively correlated with student achievement as well as six district-level leadership responsibilities were found to have a statistically significant correlation with average student academic achievement (Marzano & Waters, 2009).

The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine if a relationship existed between superintendent's tenure and student achievement in the 57 small city

school districts across New York State. Tenure was operationally defined as the length of time a district leader had served in his/her current school district. If it was determined a relationship existed, what were the district leaders' practices/initiatives that were implemented throughout the district, as well as any demographic characteristics the superintendents possessed that related to student achievement? The independent variables of this study were superintendent's tenure, perceived level of implementation of specific initiatives/practices and the demographics of the district leaders. The dependent variable was student achievement determined by mean scores of level three and four from the New York State Education (NYSED) School Report Cards, for eighth grade English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics assessments, over a three year time span (2005-06, 2006-07, and 2007-08).

Research Questions

Due to the limited research in the small city school districts across New York State, the researcher focused this study on 57 specific school districts. The research questions that drove this study included:

1. Is there a relationship between superintendent's tenure and student achievement?

2. Are there specific leadership practices/initiatives that positively relate to student achievement?

3. Is there any relationship between background demographics of superintendents and student achievement?

4. Is there a relationship between superintendent's tenure and student

4

achievement when superintendent's demography and practices/initiatives
are taken into account?

Definition of Terms

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP): successfully achieving standards set by the
overall requirements of No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB Act, 2002)

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB): 2002 non-negotiable goals for student
achievement where a minimum percentage of students are required to be
proficient on state reading and math assessments in every school (NCLB Act,
2002)

Meta-Analysis: "A range of quantitative techniques for synthesizing research
regarding a specific topic" (Marzano & Waters, 2009, p. 3)

Tenure: Years of service in district leadership position and current school
district (longevity)

Student Achievement: Mean scores of level 3 and 4 on the NYS eighth grade English
Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics assessments retrieved from the New
York State Education (NYSED) Report Card over a three year span of time.

Significance of the Study

   The results of this study benefit current and aspiring district leaders especially in small city school districts in New York State. This research also benefits school boards of education, as the study explored the relationship between superintendent tenure and student achievement. School boards are one variable that affects a superintendent's tenure which in turn relates to student achievement. District leaders may benefit from the practices/initiatives that have an impact on student achievement as well as implementation of these practices. This research looked at the longevity of superintendents in the small city school districts across New York State and recognized short tenures are more the norm, than the exception, for district leaders.

Limitations

   Throughout the research, a number of limitations were encountered. The pool of superintendents was small, having only 57 small city school districts across New York State. The small city school district population limited the demographics to those specific to small city school districts. The data used to define student achievement was based solely on eighth grade ELA and Mathematics assessments, limiting the results of student improvement and academic achievement scores to just one grade level and two core subject areas. The degree to which specific practices/initiatives were implemented in each district was based on self-perception. Superintendents' self-perceptions of specific practices/initiatives were limited to *mostly implemented* and *fully implemented*. Another limitation the researcher surprisingly encountered was the short length of tenure served by the

majority of the respondents. Correlating student achievement data to superintendent's tenure was difficult due to the consistently short tenures as well as embargoed data. The superintendents short tenures were considered a limitation due to the fact they could not "own" the data as their length of stay did not support three years worth of data. Reasons for a superintendent's abbreviated or lengthy tenure were not taken into consideration for purposes of this study. Thirty-nine out of the 57 districts returned surveys, which limited the number of participants for the research project.

Organization of the Study

This study explored the relationship between superintendent's tenure and student achievement, which resulted in a five chapter research paper. Chapter I encompassed the four questions that drove this research as well as definition of terms and limitations of the study. The following chapter was a complete review of existing literature which explored the four research questions posed in this study. Literature was based on multiple studies, in multiple states, using many assessments and measurements to define student achievement. Chapter III explained the design of the study as well as the population, sample, instrumentation and data collection procedures. The results of this study were found in Chapter IV, as well as the selected data analyses for each research question. Summary of findings, conclusions, as well as recommendations for future research were written in Chapter V.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of the relationship between superintendent's tenure and student achievement was conducted in the small city school districts in New York State (NYS) due to the lack of available research in that specific demographic region. The demographic region was of particular interest to the researcher as her educational background and experiences were concentrated in the small city schools, in New York State. Principal components of the research centered on superintendent's tenure and student achievement, superintendent's perceived level of practices/initiatives and demographics.

Leadership has long been perceived to be important to the effective functioning of organizations in general and, more recently, of schools in particular. However, some researchers and theorists assert that at best the research on school leadership is equivocal and at worst demonstrated that leadership had no effect on student achievement. (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005, p.12)

Leadership research in school districts asked the question whether or not there were direct links between a district leader's behaviors and the academic performance of the district as a whole (Alexander & Griffin, 1976; Byrd, 2001; Hart & Ogawa, 1987; Johnson, 1997). Studies showed the average length of tenure for a superintendent was becoming shorter, yet the job had become increasingly more challenging with a larger amount of accountability. In 2000, 2003, and 2006, 66% of respondents to *2009 New York Superintendents' Snapshot*, reported that they were in their first superintendentcy. Findings in 2009 showed 68% of respondents were in

their first superintendency (Fale et al., 2009).

        According to Marzano and Waters (2009), district level leadership does have a positive (measureable) impact on student achievement. Six district-level leadership responsibilities that were statistically related to student achievement included the goal-setting process, non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction, board of education and district aligned goals, monitoring said goals for students and educators as well as allocating the resources necessary to support the goals of achievement and encouraging strong school-level leadership to assume responsibility for school success; *defined autonomy* (Marzano & Waters, 2009). Another study on leadership suggested that the most successful district leaders exhibit "democratic principles, initiate structure, are considerate of followers, and allow them to participate in the decision-making process when appropriate" (Green, 2009). These studies offered two basic elements relating to effective leadership practices: concern for people and for completing established tasks.

      Multiple studies have been conducted over the years in support of Waters and Marzano's findings that district level leadership impacted student achievement (Metcalfe, 2007; Sorgi, 2006; Marzano & Waters, 2009). A study conducted by Sorgi (2006), consisting of 170 superintendents from 66 school districts belonging to the Council of Great City Schools in the United States was studied to determine if any relationship existed between superintendent's tenure and improved student achievement. Academic achievement scores were measured by correlating third through tenth grade reading and math state assessments over an eight year period of time. The study revealed that if leaders continuously changed districts, they were

9

not able to develop and execute long-term strategic plans designed to increase student achievement (Sorgi, 2006). The Indiana Statewide Testing for Education (ISTEP+) was used to determine if superintendent's longevity positively correlated with student achievement over a period of ten years. A positive correlation was determined to exist between these two factors (Metcalfe, 2007).

Older research concluded that the correlation between instructional performance and superintendent's impact on student achievement was inconclusive due to ambiguous results or minimal at best (Hart, 1984). Ten years later Leithwood, Louis, Anderson and Wahlstrom (2004) researched whether effective leadership made a difference in improving learning and found there was a correlation and the impact was second only to that of classroom instruction.

There were limited studies on the direct impact of superintendent's tenure (length of service) on student achievement in general, and the field of research was even more limited (specifically) on the direct impact of superintendent tenure in the small city school districts across New York State. Small city school districts are defined in Article 51 of The New York State Education Law "as the school districts of each city which according to the latest federal census has fewer than one hundred twenty-five thousand inhabitants" (New York State School Boards Association [NYSSBA] & New York State Bar Association [NYSBA], 2008, p. 7). According to The New York State Association of Small City School Districts (NYSASCSD) (2010), there are 57 school districts throughout New York State defined as *small city school districts*. Small city school district superintendents have traditionally focused on issues from a small city's perspective which concentrated on the parents and

children living and working in these urban settings (NYSASCSD, 2010). The gap in research associated with small city school districts precipitated a study which made an effort to add to the field of education, specifically focusing on the small city school districts across NYS. The researcher investigated the relationship between superintendent's tenure, and student achievement. Research will benefit superintendents in the small city school districts in New York State and may lead to a change in practices/initiatives as well as lengthier superintendent's tenure.

Superintendent's Tenure and Student Achievement

Little research has been published that directly connects the tenure of school superintendents with student achievement. Most studies took into account variables other than just the district leader, which made it necessary to examine research that may connect these two specific entities. Metcalfe's (2007) study emphasized that the role of superintendents was constantly shifting based on pressure from various factions. He emphasized that as leaders of school districts, the burden of responsibility for student achievement falls squarely on their shoulders. He outlined that change in district leaders led to an upheaval in the organization. He stressed the significance of a superintendent developing trust in all parties and remaining in the district long enough to provide guidance and support to stakeholders. He found a relationship between the number of years a superintendent served in a district and the increase or decrease in student achievement (Metcalfe, 2007). Longevity seemed to instill confidence in all parties involved in educating students. Marzano and Waters (2009) found that longevity of the superintendent had a positive impact on student academic achievement. The superintendent's longevity may be as few as

11

two years before impacting achievement (Marzano, & Waters, 2009).

Metcalfe's (2007) study in Indiana identified the number of years a superintendent had served in a single district and investigated if a relationship existed between the number of years of service and change in student achievement, as determined by the Indiana Statewide Testing for Education (ISTEP+), over a ten year span of time. A quantitative study with a correlational comparative research design was used with superintendent data from every public school system in Indiana between 1996 through 2006. The study found that superintendent longevity positively correlated to student achievement based on the ISTEP+, yet low student achievement on these standardized tests did not account for short superintendent tenure (Metcalfe, 2007).

The goal of every student meeting grade level standards and attaining proficiency by the year 2013-2014 was one that required school districts to regularly assess academic achievement and ensure that improvement was continuously occurring. The responsibility to ensure that improvement was sustained falls to the school district leader. The need to hire an effective leader is the responsibility of the Board of Education in each district. Although the superintendency is not a politically elected position, public officials (school board members) are charged with the responsibility to select, evaluate, and retain or dismiss a school district leader (Atherton, 2008). "Nationwide, over the last 90 years superintendent tenure has decreased from an average of fourteen years to an average of six years" (Atherton, 2008, p. 3). Atherton (2008) described the impact a high turnover rate may have on a school community. Some communities may not expect the superintendent to stay

long therefore the expectation was they were there for the short tenure, as per statistics, which may lead to a perception of instability. If a superintendent stayed for a long tenure (great than six years), the public perceived they were successful and vested in the district (Atherton, 2008). A positive correlation was found between principals who had long tenure and then went on to become superintendents with long tenure. Superintendent relationships with school boards were found to be a decisive element of superintendent tenure (Education Writers Association [EWA], 2003).

Superintendents may be faced with newly elected board members who may not be fully aware of the pressures placed on both the district and the district leaders to continuously show academic improvement. Superintendents were subjected to a large amount of pressure, which may force them to forego risk taking necessary to advance the district due to the fear of being let go. "Whatever it is you want to do, you shouldn't let fear get in your way. Fear, for most leaders, is less a crippler than a motivator" (Bennis, 2003, p. 120), conversely, "every superintendent is one election away from losing his/her job" (Metcalfe, 2007, p. 2).

Eighty-two percent of the superintendents surveyed in the *2006 New York Superintendents' Snapshot* agreed that student achievement was the primary focus of their current boards and ninety-six percent ranked assessment results vital to the board when evaluating student achievement, and an encouraging eighty-four percent of superintendents agreed that their boards are highly functional and effective (Rogers et al., 2006).

Educational, financial and administrative performances were all

measurements of school districts that must be examined by both the district leader as well as the school board. "Knowing this, board-savvy superintendents devote considerable time and attention to building and maintaining a strong, close, and productive working partnership with their boards" (Houston & Eadie, 2005, p. 73). In a 2006 study of contributing factors influencing superintendent tenure among Texas public schools superintendents, the average tenure among participants (five years) decreased as the level of difficulty working with the board president/members increased (Byrd, Drews, & Johnson, 2006).

In his study titled *Correlation between Superintendent Tenure and Improved Academic Achievement Scores in Large Urban School Districts,* Sorgi (2006) concluded that when superintendents leave a district, they tend to take their top administrators with them, which can directly impact any district initiatives already underway. This quantitative correlational study determined there was a positive relationship between superintendent tenure and improved academic performance scores measured by correlating eight years of third through tenth grade reading and math state test results retrieved from public available data (Sorgi, 2006). According to the *New York 2009 Superintendent Snapshot*, the average tenure for superintendents was 4.7 years, which was a steady decline from 5.0 years in 2006 and 5.6 years in the 2003 (Fale et al., 2009). In 2000, 2003 and 2006 sixty percent of respondents reported they were in their first superintendency yet all candidates could not be considered inexperienced as some may remain in a single superintendency for their entire career (Rogers et al., 2006). Findings in the 2009 Snapshot showed sixty eight percent of respondents were in their first superintendency, a considerable increase

14

from prior years (Fale et al., 2009).

Atherton (2008) conducted a study focused on school board members and superintendent's tenure. The study was situated in one school district where the superintendent remained in place for twenty years, which led to the questions, how and why? Data were collected in this exploratory study through individual interviews, observations, and public documents. The researcher discovered recurrent themes through triangulation of data using the above mentioned as well as members of the school board's perceptions of the superintendent. The study stated that when superintendents left their districts it tended to be for a larger school district which can offer more money and better benefits. Atherton (2008) concluded this particular superintendent may have stayed at his post for twenty years due to his core values, his belief in being an instructional leader, as well as being politically astute and producing the academic and financial results that the school community expected.

Leadership Practices/Initiatives and Student Achievement

Under *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) Act, states set a minimum percentage of students required to reach proficiency on state reading/math assessments. There were repercussions for schools failing to meet state targets and funds for professional development and teacher mentoring programs (Elmore, 2003). As noted by Elmore (2003), significant gains on performance assessments were usually followed by periods of flat performance. Some initiatives outlined to improve low performing student achievement were to first recognize, understand, then respond to the problems. Choosing the right target and properly training teachers to work

towards increased and sustained student achievement were keys to improvement. Realigning the curriculum in an effort to ensure content was taught before the assessments were administered was another key factor in raising achievement scores. Lastly, Elmore (2003) recommended schools develop a system to manage and monitor their own improvement.

In the study *An Exploration of the Effects of Superintendents on the Instructional Performance of School Districts*, Hart (1984) analyzed whether superintendents had an influence on the instructional performance of their districts. "When researchers attempt to establish a link between such leader behaviors as initiation of structure, consideration, decision making style, and supervisory style the results are often ambiguous" (Hart, 1984, p. 1). Due to the inconclusiveness of the research available, Hart proceeded to study the importance of school leadership on school effectiveness. She wrote about the two levels of performance by a superintendent; one being indirectly (influence on principals' behaviors and management style) as well as directly (control over resource allocation and curriculum development). It was assumed superintendents affect district performance; however, there were reasons to question this assumption (Hart, 1984). Hart's findings suggested that the superintendent accounted for a proportion of the scores and their variances, therefore suggesting the district leaders were associated, to some degree, with the standardized test performance of students. Hart's research concluded the leaders had an effect on at least one measure of instructional performance in the schools (1984). Although the influence is relatively small, findings supported her contention that the impact of the superintendency was one of importance when impacting

16

student achievement (Hart, 1984).

Marzano and Waters (2009) conducted a meta-analysis of research to show the influence of school district leaders on student achievement. They synthesized their research on the relationship between district leadership and student achievement. Of the twenty-seven reports that were examined, fourteen contained information about the relationship between district-level leadership and student achievement. Their findings suggested that student achievement was positively affected when district leaders were effective in carrying out their leadership responsibilities (Marzano & Waters, 2009). The district level leadership responsibilities of an effective leader were to ensure that goal setting was established in a collaborative manner, as well as non-negotiable goals for student achievement and instruction. Board of education alignment and support of district goals was a necessary priority as well as monitoring progress towards achieving instructional goals while allocating resures necessary to support student achievement and instruction along with strong school-level leadership which assumed responsibility for school success; *defined autonomy* (Marzano & Waters, 2009). Financial and human resources must be aligned with the district's mission and vision and this task was larger than it appears because every addition comes at the expense of people or programs. It took a delicate balance between central authority and school autonomy for difficult changes to occur (Forsyth, 2004).

Along these same lines, it was clearly reiterated by Downey (2001) that target objectives outlined in state assessments must be written and aligned with state standards and embedded in the curriculum. Another initiative which assisted with

improving student academic performance was aligned district pre-post criterion-referenced assessments (Downey, 2001). The district leader must take responsibility for instituting effective staff development, appropriate allocation of district resources, as well as articulation of strong expectations for high student achievement for each student. Superintendents must believe in the importance of education for all children and recognize that it is their job to ensure this happens (Downey, 2001).

Kotter was recognized as one of the foremost authorities on leadership. He closely examined and detailed initiatives and objectives chosen by CEOs and senior executives in an effort to be highly successful. In an interview, Kotter distinguished between leadership and management by stating "management is about coping with complexity while leadership is about coping with change" (Bencivenga, 2002, p. 26). He acknowledged the necessity for both leaders and managers and noted a clear functional difference between the two. Yet Bennis (2003) argued the "differences between leaders and managers are the differences between those who master the context and those who surrender to it" (p. 39). Kotter went on to say that effective CEOs did both while recognizing where their strengths and weaknesses lie (Bencivenga, 2002). Kotter explained that a leader will calm the troops while being visible and assessing what needed to be done for a district to be successful. He recognized that school systems were not systems that change easily and strong leadership was imperative in upper level positions (Bencivenga, 2002). Kotter used an eight-step change process to describe the tasks leaders face when attempting to bring about complex change in an organization. A sense of urgency must first be

established, creating a powerful guiding coalition that would occur next, and then the leader must develop a vision, communicate the vision to stakeholders, and empower others to act on the vision, and lastly, plan for and create short-term wins (Kotter, 1996). It was only in the last decade that thought has gone into developing leaders that created and articulated district wide visions and strategies. "Without enough leaders, the vision, communication, and empowerment that are at the heart of transformation will simply not happen well enough or fast enough to satisfy our needs and expectations" (Kotter, 1996, p. 165). Reeves (2002) concurred with Kotter's distinction between leadership and management, and related the complexity of the two directly to the complex educational system. A leader who set the vision for a single system is exponentially different than the leader who dealt with the more challenging task of a system of systems (Reeves, 2002).

Along with Kotter's eight-step change process, Fullan (2005) had eight elements for superintendents who wanted to make a difference and had the resolve to do so. A superintendent who was a true system thinker and understood the importance of the short term as well as the long term win could sustain change by implementing Fullan's eight core elements (Fullan, 2005). The superintendent was in a position to make moral purpose a system quality and educators, who cared, worked within a framework that raised student expectations. The whole system must be changed within the context in which people were accustomed to working (Fullan, 2005). The system leader focused on how the system could be changed for the better, in order for a large-scale reform to take place. Fullan addressed the importance of fostering a district-wide strengthening of peer relations throughout

the learning community that one leads (Fullan, 2005). State and district

accountability required a sense of transparency in order for districts to engage in

self-reflection and it was deemed essential to include local communities in the

process. In order for a district to sustain change, Fullan's fifth element encompassed

collective problem solving (Fullan, 2005). While raising the bar for student

achievement, in order to bridge the learning gap, primarily in literacy and

numeracy problem solving, teamwork and collaboration were essential. Fullan's

conviction regarding the need to assess, monitor, and implement learning

objectives, were supported by his belief in disaggregating and analyzing data as

well as forming action plans to continue making district wide improvements when

addressing student achievement. There should not be an excuse for failing to

design, implement and achieve short-term results. Fullan (2005) unequivocally

argued that the key to sustainability was leadership:

> The main mark of a school superintendent at the end of his or her tenure was
>
> not just the impact on student achievement, but equally how many good
>
> leaders he or she left behind who continued to develop in their practices as
>
> well as student achievement. (p. 18)

Effective superintendents were the key to success of improvement efforts.

Attention and time were required to develop coherence between what was being

taught and what needed to be taught in classrooms (Forsyth, 2004). The focus of

public education was student achievement. District student achievement, all over

the state, was compared and reported upon in the media. Castagnola's (2005)

research focus was Connecticut superintendents who presided in districts with

sustained high levels of student achievement and/or where student achievement had improved over time. According to the researcher, most of what was done in public education centered on student achievement, therefore it was important to understand the characteristics of an effective instructional leader at the district level (Castagnola, 2005). The study centered around three qualities of Connecticut superintendents who were effective instructional leaders: optimism and a positive attitude toward instructional leadership, healthy governing board relationships and equity. The repeated theme of increased demands for academic accountability was the focal point for superintendents who had moved toward a heightened state of instructional accountability (Castagnola, 2005). Connecticut superintendents, in districts with sustained high levels of student achievement, were administered the Superintendent as Instructional Leader Survey (SILS) in 2002. Research was lacking as to what constituted a clear definition of an effective school system leader, however the study attempted to analyze the practices of effective superintendents. Most superintendents surveyed responded that they would have chosen their same profession again as they liked their job very much (Castagnola, 2005). The inference was that superintendents, in what were defined as *successful districts*, enjoyed the continuous struggle to improve teaching and learning in their districts. These Connecticut superintendents expressed concern about their relationships with their school boards as some described them as *micro-managers*. The higher achieving district superintendents stated although they respected the board's authority, they believed it to be their sole responsibility to improve student achievement.

Whether or not leadership style of the superintendent impacted school effectiveness was the question that drove Wooderson-Perzan and Lunenburg's (2001) research. According to their study, although the leadership of the superintendent was believed to be key in the successful implementation of change that positively affected student achievement, little empirical data on superintendents' leadership styles was found. The study analyzed whether there was a statistically significant relationship between the leadership styles of superintendents, measured by the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) and demographic factors in selected Texas school districts. The demographics of the superintendents involved in the research were overwhelmingly white males (six to one ratio to females), and 50 to 59 years of age. Tenure was comparatively high in the selected districts (68% had five or more years in their current district) and 35% had less than two years experience. One quarter of the participants had earned a doctoral degree but only 9.1% held the degree in the exemplary districts. The findings stated that no other position in the educational system directly influenced change more than that of the district leader (Wooderson-Perzan & Lunenburg, 2001). Their findings identified five transformational leadership skills that were demonstrated by effective district leaders. The leadership qualities were, anticipatory skills, visioning skills, value-congruence skills, empowerment skills, and lastly, self-understanding. The superintendent had to set the expectations of student achievement in his/her district; an educational vision must be established encompassing team building and goal setting for the entire district. Superintendents deemed successful, aligned their personal values with appropriate principles, and

were freed from old perceptions or paradigms (Wooderson-Perzan & Lunenburg, 2001). The data outlined the need for district leaders to understand racial inequities, work with multicultural populations (primarily poverty level) and focus on the people in the school district that comprised their district's population. Lastly, the study touched upon charismatic leaders who had the ability to motivate teachers and students as well as facilitating change in their institution. These leaders saw improvement in student achievement while paying close attention to financial and demographic variables (Wooderson-Perzan & Lunenburg, 2001).

Smith (2007) conducted research based on the accountability for effective school leadership, after the passage of the Missouri's *Excellence in Education Act* passed in 1985. This act, enacted by the Missouri State Legislature, intended to ensure that all Missouri superintendents passed an administrator certification assessment before accepting a position in a public school, as a system leader (Beem, 2002). The survey instrument used was the School Leadership Practice Survey (SLPS), created by Smith as part of a doctoral study and was sent to 524 Missouri practicing superintendents in 2006-2007. Smith's (2007) dissertation entitled *Psychometric Properties of the School Leadership Practice Survey (SLPS) to Determine Missouri School Superintendent Perceptions About Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards Performance Indicators* was a look at behavioral science linked to attitudes, beliefs, traits, and perception measurements of effective district leaders in an educational setting. The study stemmed from the reality that in Missouri, much like all states, district leaders were held accountable for the effectiveness of the way in which they led school districts (Smith, 2007). The overall

conclusion of her study was that learning was the focus of schools and leadership. Smith found Missouri superintendents perceived ethics and managing an environment conducive for learning, as well as allocating necessary resources to support learning, were essential to creating a culture for learning. They also believed engaging the community in educational decisions were all important attributes of their practice (Smith, 2007).

Clore (1991) conducted a two-pronged study to determine what instructional leadership behaviors were emphasized by superintendents with their principals, as well as analyze the relationship between superintendents' instructional leadership behaviors, school district demographics, and student achievement on the Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills (TEAMS). Two hundred and nineteen Texas superintendents were asked to complete the Superintendent Instructional Leadership Survey (SILS) and in each of their districts, one elementary as well as one secondary principal was asked to fill out the Co-Workers Survey of Superintendent Instructional Leadership Behavior [CSSILB] (Clore, 1991). The goal was to determine if a relationship existed between the superintendents' instructional leadership behavior, school district demographics, and student achievement using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients and multiple linear regressions. The researcher concluded superintendents had to possess the ability to enable others to create a shared district vision. Superintendents emphasized a variety of instructional leadership behaviors which varied among five task areas: instructional planning, staffing for instruction, organizing for instruction, human resource development and evaluating instruction (Clore, 1991).

Kercheval and Newbill (2001) conducted a yearlong study of key effective practices in Ohio's improved school districts. Between 1999-2000 and 2000-2001 school years, approximately one third (189) of the districts in Ohio improved their performance rating on the Ohio Local Report Card (Kercheval & Newbill, 2001). The study encompassed three phases of data collection: use of the Delphi technique to identify effective practices, telephone interviews with administrators/teachers, and site visits with the intent of gathering supporting documentation for steps taken to improve academic achievement. Participants identified curriculum mapping as the single greatest factor in improving academic achievement. District and school leaders' perception was that they stressed the importance of an aligned curriculum (all areas) to state proficiency exams and standards. Participants' perceptions were that their intent was to stress the curriculum alignment initiative to building level administrators, who in turn, were asked to hold educators accountable for adhering to the aligned curriculum. The report stated that superintendents of improving school districts in Ohio (between 1999 and 2001) monitored the efforts and progress of curricular renewal (Kercheval & Newbill, 2001). One major practice that emerged from the study, according to the perception of the superintendent, was in the area of professional development for all educators. The professional development centered on literacy intervention, curriculum mapping and the allocation of resources necessary to accomplish the districts' goals (Daly & Ainley, 2000; Levine & Lezotte, 1995; Zigarelli, 1996). A common theme infused throughout the study was that no single initiative, in and of itself, was linked to a district's success but rather effective practices were implemented together while focused on a common goal. The key

effective practices identified, corresponded closely with research of effective school districts (Daly & Ainley, 2000; Levine & Lezotte, 1995; Zigarelli, 1996). Another striking feature of all effective districts was the extent to which data were used to guide improvement throughout the district (Kercheval & Newbill, 2001). Data drove intervention strategies, remediation, and tracking of student progress throughout the district. Implementation of strategies may vary from district to district but the district leader was instrumental in guiding successful changes throughout the Ohio school districts (Kercheval & Newbill, 2001).

Research on urban reform had been focused, primarily, on large urban districts. Hentschke, Nayfack, and Wohlstetter (2009) conducted a study on the less visible small urban districts. Superintendents' roles in the improvement process of urban districts were highly dependent upon the size of the district. A multisite case study investigated smaller urban districts, from the perspective of the district leaders and leadership teams. The purposeful sample of the study was selected using test scores, based on California's accountability status, between the years of 2002-2005. Smaller urban districts that demonstrated improvement in student achievement were selcted for the research. Data collection included semistructured, ninety minute interviews and review of documents. Findings showed that district leaders and reforms were heavily influenced by the requirements set forth by the NCLB Act. Another characteristic of an effective district reform was board-adopted strategic plans. In many cases these plans were the catalyst for reform (Hentschke, Nayfack, & Wohlstetter, 2009). A finding that emerged from the study, in the small urban districts, was the superintendents'

hands-on approach to leadership and the impact of their reform on those that worked most closely with them, such as central office staff and school principals (Hentschke, Nayfack, & Wohlstetter, 2009). Superintendents in the four school districts were personally involved in communicating and managing student-relevant information such as student assessment data, teacher assessments, district goals/strategies and school profiles. The strategies that emerged from the leaders of smaller urban districts were not discernibly different from those which were common in the larger urban districts except how personally engaged in instructional leadership the smaller district superintendents were than those in the larger districts (Hentschke, Nayfack, & Wohlstetter, 2009).

A case study conducted in a large, urban, California school district was focused around positive changes that affected student achievement (Vasquez, 2009). Vasquez concurred that a heightened sense of urgency, due to possible sanctions for schools and districts that failed to meet state standards, in accordance with NCLB, was the catalyst for the changes in the district. The reform strategies leveraged in the school district spanned from strategic planning, organizational audits, instructional alignment, to stakeholder management and a collaborative school community. Vasquez (2009) surveyed the superintendent on ten key reforms and her perception of the level of implementation of these reforms in her district. He indicated professional development, finance/budget, governance and board relations as well as contract negotiations and family and community engagement were among some of the reforms. The analysis of the case study indicated that several reform strategies were perceived to be implemented and utilized to develop

a vision and mission for the district in an attempt to improve student achievement (Vasquez, 2009).

According to Vasquez (2009), creating change within a school district, in an attempt to improve student achievement, entailed reform strategies that must be implemented district-wide, complete with board aligned visions and goals.

Background Demographics and Student Achievement

The lack of national data on the relationship of school superintendent's tenure and demography to student achievement was the focus of the research. Superintendents were responsible for a multitude of tasks; primarily, overseeing student achievement, in an effort to achieve ever-increasing learning standards (Rogers et al., 2006).

Glass (1992) gathered survey data on different characteristics of school district superintendents and compared them to replicated studies conducted in 1971 and 1982. Random samples of 2,536 superintendents (obtained from the 1988 Common Core of Data Public Education Agency Universe) were mailed surveys and 1,724 responded to the study (68% return rate). Of the respondents, 115 were women, 66 were minorities and the rest were white males, which confirmed that only a small percentage of the nation's superintendents were anything other than white males at the time of the study. However there were a greater number of minority and women superintendents serving larger districts than in the 1982 survey. The study showed that superintendents tended to originate from small-town and rural backgrounds, come from blue-collar families, have a college education and have a mean age of 50. The average superintendent had more formal education than their

counterparts in past decades. In an era when school curriculum has increased,

superintendent visibility was expected in the community as well as in the school

district, and a management position had transformed into a leadership position, the

complexity of the job had steadily increased (Glass, 1992). Superintendents tended

to spend about five years in a secondary level classroom, as teachers of social

studies, science, or math, before taking on their first administrative role. Glass

discovered that most superintendents spent about 15 years in no more than three

districts as leaders and three quarters of the superintendents had been in their

current position for five or six years.

In 2006 *The Study of the Superintendency in New York* conducted by The

Council of School Superintendents where 536 responses out of 720 chief school

officers were surveyed (Rogers et al., 2006). The most dramatic difference that

stands out in this study was the increasing gender diversity in the superintendency.

Since the year 2000 a significant jump in the number of superintendent vacancies

had occurred and the percentage of women filling those vacancies had increased as

well. Between the years 2000 and 2003, 30% of new hirees were women, 35% of

those appointed between 2003 and 2006 were comprised of women and nearly 50%

of those hired in 2006 were women equating to 24.2% of all NYS superintendents

being women at the time of the study (Rogers et al., 2006). While the percentage of

women seemed to have increased since 1991, there appeared to be little to no

increase in the racial/ethnic diversity of the NYS superintendency. A much greater

proportion of vacancies were being filled by women, than in previous generations

as, stated in the 2009 Snapshot. The proportion of women appointed to

superintendency positions continued to increase from 1991 (eight percent women) to 2009 (thirty percent women). Women superintendents have increased nearly six percent in the last three years (Fale et al., 2009). In the *2009 Snapshot*, the mean age of chief school officers was 49.7 in 1991, 52.7 in the year 2000, 54.6 in 2006, and in 2009 the mean age dropped slightly to 54.3. The mean age of entry into the superintendency was 46.5 which was an increase from 2006, where the average age of entry was 44.7. It appeared superintendents of both genders were taking on their first district leadership position later on in life. The new superintendents' planned retirement age does not appear to be increasing as rapidly as the age of entry (Fale et al., 2009). Shortened superintendency careers and an accelerated turnover rate were one of the results of the study. In 2000 and 2003, 60% of respondents reported they were in their first superintendency, which mirrored the 2006 results, however this number increased to 67% in 2009 (Fale et al., 2009). Five years was the average longevity for superintendents in 2006 compared to 5.6 in 2003 with a decrease in longevity in 2009 to 4.7 years (Fale et al., 2009). As evidenced through many cited studies, superintendents reported curriculum and instruction as their strongest area of preparation for the job as well as their strongest current skill level (Rogers et al., 2006). Throughout the Snapshot, professional development, re-designing and aligning curriculum, and the use of data were the priorities for chief school administrators in the attempt to raise academic achievement throughout their districts.

Farmer (2007) synthesized data which examined career paths to the Texas public school superintendency. Five career paths were identified as the major

career pathways to the district leader. A 31-question survey was administered to all superintendents in the North and West Texas education service center area as well as superintendents serving in the seven major urban public school districts in Texas. Farmer's findings outlined that school administrators who possessed a doctorate degree were more likely to take on the role of a secondary educator/administrator and progress to the superintendency. Female administrators tended to take a more direct route to a district leadership position than their male counterparts, however they remained in lower ranking administrative positions for longer periods of time then males did. They also entered into superintendency positions later in their careers as they may have halted their careers to devote time to their families (Farmer, 2007). Farmer (2007) outlined the five possible career paths administrators chose as well as the percentage of participants who chose that selected path: first path was that of a secondary teacher, secondary principal, then a superintendent and that constituted 38% of the participants. Eleven percent of administrators chose the path of secondary teacher, secondary assistant principal, secondary principal, and superintendent. Seven percent began as a secondary teacher, secondary assistant principal, secondary principal, assistant superintendent, and then superintendent while six percent of the population began as a secondary teacher, secondary principal, assistant superintendent, and then superintendent. Finally a mere three percent followed the path of secondary teacher, elementary principal, secondary principal, superintendent.

CHAPTER III: METHODS

The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine if there was a relationship between superintendent's tenure, in his/her current district, and student achievement in the small city school districts in New York State (NYS). Student achievement was operationally defined as scores of level three or four on eighth grade NYS English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics assessments, over a three year time span. The data were collected from the NYS Education (NYSED) Website, for 2005-2006, 2006-2007, and 2007-2008. A second focus was superintendent's perceptions of the degree of implementation of specific practices/ initiatives outlined in the School Leadership Practice Survey (SLPS). The instrument was modified, with permission, from Dr. Melody Smith's 2007 survey (see Appendix A) and based on the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards (see Appendix B). The intent was to determine if a relationship existed between superintendent's perceived levels of implementation of practices/initiatives and student achievement. Thirdly, superintendent's demographics were investigated to determine if a relationship existed between effective superintendent's demographics and student achievement. Lastly, superintendent's tenure and student achievement were looked at in combination with superintendent demography, as well as taking into account their perceived level of practices/initiatives, to investigate whether a relationship existed.

Research Questions

This study was designed to answer the following research questions:

1. Is there a relationship between superintendent's tenure and student

32

achievement?

2. Are there specific leadership practices/initiatives that positively relate to student achievement?

3. Is there a relationship between background demographics of superintendents and student achievement?

4. Is there a relationship between superintendent's tenure and student achievement when superintendent's demography and practices/initiatives are taken into account?

Design

This research investigated the relationship between superintendent's tenure and student achievement in the small city school districts across New York State. The study identified the number of years that superintendents served in their current districts and was correlated with data obtained from the NYSED report card, (mean scores of level three or four on the eighth grade NYS ELA and Mathematics assessments), over a three year time span. In all four research questions, the dependent variable remained student achievement and in research question one the independent variable was superintendent's tenure. Pearson's correlations were run on student achievement and tenure using SPSS v.17.0 software. For research question two Cronbach's alpha statistical technique was conducted to determine reliability for the *School Leadership Practice Survey* (SLPS) completed by the pool of superintendents via an email survey. Once the instrument was determined to be internally consistent, principal component factor analysis was run and the 20 question survey was reduced to 18 items, consisting of three summated rating scales

(*resources, school community, and leader scale*). Next a correlation was run between

superintendent's demography and student achievement. Lastly, Pearson's

correlation coefficient was performed on the scales and correlated with student

achievement. Research question four involved the demography and tenure of

superintendents as the independent variable, as well as the summated rating scales

from research question two. Regression was run two different times, using the same

software. The first time the analysis was run: eighth grade ELA scores were the

dependent variable and the second analysis run used eighth grade Mathematics

assessment scores as the dependent variable. Finally, a step-wise regression was

run in order for SPSS software to determine the best equation based on the selected

independent variables.

Population and Sample

The population for this study was 57 sitting superintendents across the small

city school districts in New York State. The researcher sampled all 57

superintendents and received a response rate of 39/57 (69% return rate). NYSED

Law defines small city school districts as the school districts that have less than one

hundred twenty-five thousand inhabitants, based on the latest federal census

(NYSASCSD, 2010). Currently, small city school districts serve more than a quarter

million children and employ more than 20,000 teachers and staff members. These

districts have twice the student enrollment than the average district in the state and

collectively, they serve communities totaling more than 1.5 million residents. Some

characteristics of these districts include higher percentages of disadvantaged

students, limited English proficiency, dropouts and students with special educational

needs (NYSASCSD, 2010).

Instrumentation

The *School Leadership Practice Survey* (SLPS) used in this research was modified from Smith's original research survey and based on *The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards* (Green, 2009). Smith created a 100 question tool to analyze the perceptions of Missouri school superintendents based on practices relating to the ISLLC Standards performance indicators (2007). The modified survey instrument used in this research was comprised of eight background demographic questions and 20 questions based on the ISSLC Standards and sent via survey monkey to all 57 superintendents in the small city school districts across New York State. Surveys were sent and returned, confidentially, via email. Dr. Melody Smith granted permission, via email, for her survey to be used and modified for this research project (see Appendix C). Lois Adams-Rodgers, Deputy Executive Director of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) granted permission for a modified survey, based on the ISSLC standards to be administered to the 57 sitting superintendents in the small city school districts in NYS (see Appendix D). Lastly, Robert Biggerstaff, the Executive Director and General Counsel of the New York State Association of the Small City School Districts (NYSASCSD), supported the research in a letter sent via email (see Appendix E). The ISSLC Standards are a series of six standards and performance indicators that link leadership initiatives/practices to effective educational outcomes (see Appendix B).

Data Collection Procedures

Superintendents from each participating school district were sent an invitation, via email, to participate in this research. They were informed their responses would be confidential and information would not be presented in an individual fashion for any reason. A letter from Robert Biggerstaff, the Executive Director and General Counsel for the New York State Association of Small City School Districts, was attached to the initial email (see Appendix F). Then a 28 question survey was sent via email (Survey Monkey) to each of the current 57 superintendents in the small city school districts across NYS. A follow up email was sent two weeks later, reminding those superintendents who had not returned their survey, to please do so if they were interested in participating in the research project. Lastly, a thank you email was sent to all of the 57 superintendents, whether or not they chose to participate in the research, after a four week span of time. For the purpose of this study, student achievement was defined as the mean scores of level three and four on the eighth grade NYS ELA and Mathematics assessments. Each district's school report cards for 2005-06, 2006-07, and 2007-08 were retrieved from the New York State Education website. Scores were arranged in a Micro-soft Excel spreadsheet and the mean was mathematically determined for each exam, in each school district, and recorded in a separate spread sheet. Analysis for each research question was run using SPSS v.17.0 software.

Variables of the Study

Student achievement was the dependent variable for the four research questions. There were three independent variables for the four research questions.

For the first question, superintendent's tenure was the independent variable which was compiled from the email survey returned by the pool of participants. Data was compiled into a Micro-soft Excel spread sheet and later transformed into SPSS software for data analysis. For research question two, the 20 question survey based on superintendent's perceived level of implementation of practices/ initiatives served as the independent variable. The survey was reduced to three summated scales using component factor analysis. Research question three used superintendent's demography as the independent variable and student achievement stayed the dependent variable. Lastly, the independent variables for research question four were the demographics of the superintendents (age, gender, years in education), as well as tenure and the three summated rating scales from research question two.

Data Analysis Techniques

Two set of data were used for analysis. The first set encompassed the eighth grade scores on the NYS ELA and Mathematics assessments (level three or four), obtained from the NYS Education website. Scores were based on three years of data (2005-06, 2006-07, and 2007-08). The second set of data was collected by the researcher using the email surveys returned by superintendents in the small city school districts in NYS and stored in the Survey Monkey website. Each school district was assigned a numerical code and scores of three's and four's (proficiency) were compiled into a Micro-soft Excel spreadsheet: mean scores were analyzed and recorded for ELA and Mathematics. Pearson's correlations were run using SPSS v. 17.0 software, between student performance on the NYS eighth grade ELA and

Mathematics assessments, and superintendent's tenure.

For research question two a 20 question survey titled *School Leadership Practice Survey* (SLPS) was sent, via email, to the 57 small city school district superintendents in the small city school districts in NYS. Cronbach's alpha statistical technique was conducted to determine reliability of the SLPS utilizing SPSS v.17.0. The full SLPS, with 20 items, produced a Cronbach's alpha of 0.94. Using Cronk's (1999) criteria of close to 1.00 as a strong reliability coefficient, the SLPS was internally consistent. The SLPS was reduced to 18 items whereas three summated rating scales could be conceptually and statistically related and therefore grouped together, using principal component factor analysis, utilizing verimax rotation. Factors were grouped into three scales; *resources, school community,* and *the leader scale.* Pearson's correlation coefficient was performed on these three factors, identified on the practices/initiates portion of the electronic survey, and correlated with student achievement.

Regression was run using SPSS v.17.0 software for research question three. The first time the analysis was run, the eighth grade NYS ELA assessments, for a three year period, was the dependent variable (student achievement). The independent variables that were selected were chosen from the 28 question, on-line survey administered to superintendents. The summated rating scales from research question two were loaded into the analysis as independent variables. Gender was re-coded into two variables; female=0 and male=1. Superintendent's age, gender, number of years as an educator, tenure and the three summated rating scales were the selected independent variables, ELA scores were the dependent variable. Upon

running the initial regression there was a strong positive correlation between all grouped together variables. *Resources* and superintendent tenure had the strongest correlation with student achievement and all other variables were extracted. When the rest of the independent variables were added back in, the ELA model was still weak, yet somewhat stronger than when the independent variable was simply resources. All variables could be of interest but the initial model was weak. The researcher let the data show what was most important and had the greatest impact on student achievement. In order for the SPSS software to find the best equation based on the selected independent variables, a stepwise regression was run.

When all variables were grouped together they were not showing a statistical significance in the model; however, that was not the case when statistical analyses were run for research question one and two. Based on the stepwise data analysis, superintendent's tenure as well as *resources* proved to have an impact on student achievement. All other variables were extracted from the analysis except the two named variables.

For research question two, an identical analysis was run using mathematics as the dependent variable. The mathematics model summary indicated that 27% of variability in academic achievement, pertaining to student achievement in mathematics scores on the eighth grade NYS assessments, was attributable to the predictor *resources. Resources* was the name given to one of the three summated scales from research question two that was inclusive of variables such as early literacy programs, academic intervention services, board of education aligned collaborative and non-negotiable goals, as well as monitoring and evaluating goals,

resources allocated for student achievement, professional development, technology

and programs that meet the needs of the students and families in school districts.

CHAPTER IV: DATA ANALYSIS

Four major research questions guided this investigation: Is there a relationship between superintendent's tenure and student achievement? Are there specific leadership practices/initiatives that positively relate to student achievement? Is there a relationship between background demographics of superintendents and student achievement and lastly, is there any relationship between superintendent's tenure and student achievement when superintendent's demography and superintendent's practices/initiatives are taken into account?

An electronic survey of New York State small city school district superintendents provided demographic information as well as the perceived level of implementation of school leadership practices/initiatives in respective school districts. Public data retrieved from three years of NYS ELA and Mathematics eighth grade assessments were used to define student achievement based on scores of level three or four, in each district. Tenure was operationally defined as the number of years each superintendent presided over their current district, counting the current academic year as one full year. Survey respondents answered 20 scaled items as well as open-ended questions pertaining to the perceived level of implementation of School Leadership Practice Survey (SLPS). A five point scale was used to measure superintendent's perceived level of implementation of practices/initiatives (ranging from one *not implemented*, to five *fully implemented*) in their district.

Findings

A pool of 57 superintendents was sent electronic surveys via email. Of the 57 surveyed, 39 responded (69% return rate), including 28 men, six women, and five who did not provide information on their gender. The researcher compared the 39 superintendents' responses, with student achievement.

Table 1

School Leadership Practice Survey Results

Leadership Practice Question	Level of Implementation				
	Not	Rarely	Somewhat	Mostly	Fully
1	2.6%	0.0%	23.1%	**64.1%****	10.3%
2	0.0%	0.0%	10.3%	**48.7%**	41.0%
3	0.0%	2.6%	34.2%	26.3%	**36.8%**
4	2.6%	2.6%	15.4%	33.3%	**46.2%**
5	0.0%	2.6%	15.4%	**56.4%**	25.6%
6	2.6%	5.3%	28.9%	34.2%	28.9%
7	2.6%	10.3%	30.8%	**35.8%**	20.5%
8	2.6%	2.6%	30.8%	**43.6%**	20.5%
9	0.0%	2.6%	10.3%	**53.8%**	33.3%
10	0.0%	0.0%	15.4%	**43.6%**	41.0%
11	0.0%	2.6%	26.3%	47.4%	23.7%
12	2.6%	2.6%	25.6%	**38.5%**	30.8%
13	0.0%	12.8%	33.3%	**38.5%**	15.4%
14	0.0%	13.2%	26.3%	36.8%	23.0%
15	0.0%	5.1%	28.2%	**38.5%**	28.2%
16	0.0%	5.3%	21.1%	**50.0%**	23.7%
17	0.0%	5.1%	17.9%	**53.8%**	23.1%
18	0.0%	0.0%	23.1%	**56.4%**	20.5%
19	0.0%	0.0%	7.7%	**53.8%**	38.5%
20	0.0%	2.6%	10.3%	33.3%	**56.4%**

*Note. Bold indicates the highest percent of responses for each question. ** Indicates the highest percent of responses overall. For specific leadership practices by question, see Appendix A.*

Overall, respondents to the *School Leadership Practice Survey* (SLPS) were consistent in their self-perception of the level of practices/initiatives implemented in their respective school districts. As seen in Table 1, very few superintendents responded one, two or three (*not/rarely/somewhat* implemented) to any of the questions posed.

Research Question 1: Is there a relationship between superintendent's tenure and student achievement?

Pearson's correlations were run using SPSS v. 17.0 software between student performance on the NYS eighth grade ELA and Mathematics assessments, and superintendent's tenure (see Table 2).

Table 2

Summary of Correlations Between Tenure and Student Achievement

Variables	1	2	3
1. Tenure	—	.391*	.370*
Student Achievement			
2. ELA		—	.880**
3. Math			—

Note: N=37. *p < .05. **p < .01

The two variables under study were student achievement and the superintendent's tenure. The Pearson's correlation coefficient between ELA scores and tenure was (r=.39) which was statistically significant at the p<0.05 level. This was a moderate positive relationship that was statistically significant according to McMillan (2008). There was an association between the two variables but what caused that association cannot be determined from this investigation. This was in

part due to the complex nature of the relationship between the actions of the superintendent and student achievement.

The Pearson's correlation coefficient between scores on the NYS eighth grade mathematics assessments and superintendent's tenure (r=.37), was statistically significant at the $p<0.05$ level. A moderate positive correlation existed between student achievement in mathematics and superintendent tenure (McMillan, 2008).

These findings showed that student achievement was positively related to superintendent longevity in a statistically significant manner.

Research Question 2: Are there specific leadership practices/initiatives that positively relate to student achievement?

Utilizing SPSS v. 17.0, Cronbach's alpha statistical technique was conducted to determine reliability of the SLPS. Cronk (1999) suggested Cronbach's alpha measured internal consistency of an instrument. Using Cronk's criteria of close to 1.00 as a strong reliability coefficient, the SLPS was internally consistent, as the full School Leadership Practice Survey produced a Cronbach's alpha of 0.94. Construct validity was analyzed utilizing SPSS Statistics v. 17.0, through principal component factor analysis with verimax rotation, to determine if the 20 item SLPS could be reduced into a smaller set of variables. Lastly, Pearson's correlation was performed in an effort to investigate whether a relationship existed between student achievement and superintendent's perceived level of practices/initiatives implemented throughout their districts.

The dependent variable for this question was student achievement, defined as proficiency scores (level three or four) on the NYS eighth grade ELA and

Mathematics assessments, over a period of three years. A 20 question survey titled

School Leadership Practice Survey (SLPS) was sent via email to the 57 small city

school district superintendents in NYS. Of the 57 who received the survey, 39

superintendents completed and returned the SLPS. The survey was based on

superintendents' perceived level of implementation of practices/initiatives in their

districts, based on the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC).

Utilizing SPSS v. 17.0 Cronbach's alpha statistical technique was conducted to

determine reliability of the SLPS. Overall, respondents to the SLPS were consistent

in their self-perception of mostly to fully implemented practices/initiatives in the

districts they presided over (see Table 1).

    After construct validity was analyzed, through principal component factor

analysis, the 20 item survey could be reduced into a smaller set of variables. The

SLPS was reduced to 18 items whereas three summated rating scales could be

conceptually and statistically related and therefore grouped together. Questions 12,

19, and 20 loaded together and were titled *Leader Scale*. These three questions

were based on superintendents' perception of their district's vision, mission, and

policies. Next, questions 1, 5, 14, and 15 scored high on the loading scale resulting

in a closer association of the item making up the factor entitled *School Community.*

School Community questions were centered on a district's aligned curriculum,

community partnerships with the district, as well as the perceived level of diversity

in the district. Lastly, the majority of the items that loaded closely together were

named *Resources*, and that included questions 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 17, and 18

(see Appendix A). The questions related to resources mentioned literacy and

intervention programs, board of education and collaborative goal setting process, as well as monitoring goals, professional development, and the school community as a whole. After initial factor analysis, two items loaded onto all three factors, therefore they were not included in any of the summated rating scale. Those two items were question 13 (school community involved in school efforts) and number 16 (a culture of high expectations for self, student, and staff performance). Research question two was analyzed through principal component factor analysis with verimax rotation to determine if items could be reduced. Item-total analysis assessed the internal consistency of data, tested reliability of a set of data, measured a single construct, and assessed a number of items to determine whether or not all items "measure the same construct" (Cronk, 1999, p. 97-101). The SLPS was based on the ISLLC Standards with 20 items, or factors. Cronbach's alpha determined there was a high degree to which all items were measuring the intended construct. This was the basis for the summated rated scales.

Pearson's correlation coefficient was performed on three factors identified on the practices/initiates portion of the electronic survey, completed by superintendents, and correlated with student achievement (see Table 3).

Pearson's correlation coefficient between Math and *resources* ($r=0.55$) at the $p<0.01$ as well as Math and the *leader scale* ($r=0.49$) at the $p<0.05$, were highly statistically significant. ELA grade 8 assessment results and *resources* ($r=0.49$) at the $p<.001$ level was highly statistically significant. Student achievement in ELA and the *leader scale*, ($r=0.48$) at the $p<0.01$ achievement correlated with grade 8 ELA scores. There was a greater statistically significant correlation with eighth grade math

scores and *resources* than ELA. Lastly, *school community* and ELA scores had an

(r=0.32) at the *p*<0.05 which again was significantly significant.

Table 3

Summary of Correlations Between Leadership Practices and Student Achievement

Variables	2	3	4	5
Leadership Practices				
1. Resources	.592**	.524**	.492**	.547**
2. School Community	—	.349*	.316*	.316*
3. Leadership Scale		—	.476**	.487**
Student Achievement				
4. ELA			—	.880**
5. Math				—

Note: N=37. *p < .05. **p < .01.

This study found that, student achievement (as measured by the mean scores

of proficiency on eighth grade ELA and Mathematics assessments) was statistically

significant when correlated with factors of *resources, school community* and the

leader scale.

Research Question 3: Is there a relationship between background

demographics of superintendents and student achievement?

Superintendents were asked to respond to an electronic survey that

encompassed questions pertaining to their age, gender, years in education, and last

position as an educator before becoming an administrator. Questions also included

superintendent's last position before becoming a superintendent, as well as years of

experience as a building level leader. Tenure was not used as a variable as research question one already established that superintendent's tenure had a relationship with student achievement. Using SPSS software v. 17.0 a correlation was run between superintendent's demography and student achievement, which showed that no correlation existed (see Table 4).

Table 4

Summary of Correlations Between Superintendent's Demography and Student Achievement

Variables	N	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Superintendent's Demography									
Age	38	.181	.455**	-.160	-0.46	.094	.302	.168	.184
Years in education	38		—	-.065	-.238	-.074	.388*	-.162	-.126
Years experience as a building level admin	38						—	.256	.201
Student Achievement									
ELA	38							—	.880**
Math	38								—

Note: *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Using SPSS software v. 17.0 a separate ANOVA test was run to determine if the categorical variables including gender, last position held as an educator before becoming an administrator as well as last position held before becoming a superintendent had a relationship to student achievement. The ANOVA test showed these categorical variables were not statistically significant with student achievement.

Research Question 4: Is there a relationship between superintendent's tenure and student achievement when superintendent's demography and superintendent's practices/initiatives are taken into account?

Data gathered for research questions two and three were used for research question four. Using SPSS software v. 17.0 a regression analysis was run on the demographic responses, including the summated rating scales from research question two. For purposes of data analysis gender was re-coded; female=0 and male=1. The first analysis that was run used the eighth grade ELA mean scores on the NYS assessment for a period of three years, as the dependent variable and the independent variables were the superintendent's years in education, tenure in current district, age, gender and the three summated rating scales from research question two.

Table 5

Summary of Multiple Regression Analyses

Predictor	Dependent Student Achievement Variable			
	ELA		Math	
	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β
Step 1				
Control variables[a]	.413		.408	
Step 2	.237		.265	
Resources		.487**		.515**
Step 3	.345			
Resources		.393*		
Tenure		.341*		

[a]Control variables included years in education, leader scale, gender, school community, tenure, resources, and age. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$

49

In the model summary, (r=.64) indicating there was a strong positive correlation between all variables (r) and the ELA mean (see Table 6).

Table 6

Model Summary of Regression Analysis for ELA

R	R^2	ΔR^2	Std. Error
.64	.41	.25	11.17

Correlation coefficients range from -1.0 to +1.0, as the variables which were loaded into the analysis increase, so will student achievement. In the model summary r-squared=.41, which accounts for 41% of student achievement was attributed to superintendent's tenure, years in education, as well as the three summated rating scales from research question two. Lastly, the adjusted r-squared=.25, which was an estimate of the degree to which the selected independent variables (tenure, years in education as well as rating scales) related to student achievement. The coefficients chart had a *resource* significance=.163 and *tenure*=.077, close to the 1.0 range. Based on the analysis, there was no relationship between all other variables and student achievement.

In order to identify the best equation based on the selected independent variables, a stepwise regression was run. This is a technique for calculating "a regression equation that instructs the computer to find the 'best' equation by entering independent variable in various combinations and orders" (Vogt, 2005, p. 311).

In the model summary, (r=.49), a strong correlation between (constant) *resources* and student achievement on the ELA eighth grade NYS assessment (see Table 7).

Table 7

Model Summary of Stepwise Regression Analysis for ELA

R	R^2	ΔR^2	Std. Error
.49	.24	.21	11.43

The r-squared coefficient, when correlated with ELA eighth grade mean scores and just *resources,* from the summated scale was equal to .24. The independent variable, student achievement, had a 24% impact, by resources alone. *Resources* had a moderate impact on student achievement based on the summated scales in research question two. *Resources* was the name given to one of the three summated scales from research question two that was inclusive of variables such as early literacy programs, academic intervention services, board of education aligned collaborative and non-negotiable goals, as well as monitoring and evaluating goals, resources earmarked for student achievement, professional development, technology and programs that meet the needs of the students/families in the school districts. All factors presented themselves to be about school processes and programs, which were perceived to have a high level of implementation, according to the surveyed superintendents.

When all variables were grouped together they were not showing a statistical significance in the model: however that was not the case when Pearson's correlation and factor analysis was run for research question one and two. Based on the

stepwise data analysis, superintendent's tenure as well as *resources* (summated

scale based on the SLPS), proved to have a statistically significant impact on student

achievement. All other variables were extracted from the analysis except the two

named variables. Next, tenure was added to *resources* and the r-squared improved

to .30. The analysis showed 30% of student achievement on the eighth grade NYS

ELA assessments, was related to the predictors of superintendent's tenure and the

summated scale, *resources.*

The researcher ran the same analysis using the eighth grade NYS mathematics

assessment scores for a period of three years, as the dependent variable (see Table

8).

Table 8

Model Summary of Regression Analysis for Mathematics

R	R^2	ΔR^2	Std. Error
.64	.41	.24	14.5

In the model summary, (r=.64) indicating there was a strong positive

correlation between all variables (r) and the mathematics mean. In the model

summary r-squared=.41, which accounted for 41% of student achievement attributed

to said predictors of superintendent's tenure, age, years of education, as well as the

summated rating scales. Lastly, the adjusted r-squared=.24 which was an estimate of

the degree to which the selected independent variables explained student

achievement (24% of achievement was attributed to chosen predictors). These

numbers were almost identical to the analysis ran using mean scores from the ELA

assessments. The coefficients chart had a *resource* significance level=.102 and

tenure=.154, indicating that for this model, superintendent's tenure was not a predictor of the dependent variable. All other variables were excluded from the analysis as they did not show a statistically significant contribution to the relationship of student achievement. Significance was based on zero to one, with one being very likely to occur by chance, that is not what the researcher was interested in, as anything less than .05 would indicate the results were less likely to occur by chance (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1989).

In order to identify the best equation based on the selected independent variables, a stepwise regression was run. The researcher selected this analysis in order to have a forward selection and a backward elimination in an attempt to include criteria that had an impact on the dependent variable.

Once all variables were extracted, except *resources,* the model summary showed r=.52 (see Table 9).

Table 9

Model Summary of Stepwise Regression Analysis for Mathematics

R	R^2	ΔR^2	Std. Error
.52	.27	.24	14.48

The model summary indicated that r-squared=.27, showing that 27% of variability in academic achievement, pertaining to student achievement in mathematics scores on the eighth grade NYS assessments, were attributable to the predictor *resources.* While the result was only a modest fit, the model was significant: *resources* did have a significant effect on student achievement as per the coefficient summary table where the variable was shown to be a significant

predictor. All factors presented themselves to be about school processes and

programs, which were perceived to have a high level of implementation, according

to the surveyed pool of candidates.

CHAPTER V: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research data answered the first and paramount question of this study: given the drastic changes education has undergone over the years, is there a relationship between superintendent's tenure and student achievement? For purposes of this research student achievement was operationally defined as the scores of level three or four (proficiency) on the NYS eighth grade ELA and Mathematics assessments spanning over a three year period of time. Superintendent tenure was defined as years served in current district (counting current year as one full year). The 57 small city school district superintendents, across New York State, were sent electronic surveys via email. Of the 57 surveyed, 39 responded (69% return rate), including 28 men, six women, and five who did not provide information on their gender.

The second research question that drove this study asked if specific leadership practices/initiatives existed that positively related to student achievement. Superintendents were asked to rate their perceived level of implementation of practices/initiatives in their districts using the *School Leadership Practice Survey* (SLPS), which was a modified instrument from Smith's research in 2007. The survey was based upon the *Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium* (ISLLC) standards and determined to be internally consistent.

Research question three asked if a relationship existed between background demographics of superintendents and student achievement. Demographic questions pertained to age, gender, years in education, prior educational positions

held before becoming a building level and district level administrator. Tenure was not included in this question. Lastly, research question four investigated whether a relationship existed between superintendent's tenure and student achievement when superintendent's demography and practices/initiatives were taken into account. Electronic surveys were used to collect data on superintendent's background demographics as well as their perceived level of implementation of practices/initiatives in their current school districts. Public documents, specifically NYSED school district report cards, spanning over a three year period of time (2005-2006, 2006-2007, 2007-2008), were utilized. The researcher operationally defined student achievement as scores of level three or four on the NYS ELA and Mathematics assessments.

Electronic surveys, consisting of 28 questions, were sent to the 57 small city school district superintendents across NYS, in January, 2010. The survey data was stored in the Survey Monkey website, and then compiled into a Micro-soft Excel spreadsheet, using assigned numerical codes for each school district. The second set of data collected were the eighth grade ELA and Mathematics NYS assessment scores over a three year period of time. NYSED website was the origin for the data. Pearson's correlations were run using SPSS v. 17.0 software between student performance on NYS assessments and superintendent tenure for the first research question. Research question two used SPSS software to reduce the 20 item scales of practices and initiatives into 18 items with three summated rating scales. All analysis was run after Cronbach's alpha was conducted to determine the SLPS was a reliable instrument. Pearson's correlation was performed on practices/initiatives and

correlated with student achievement. A correlation was run using SPSS for research question three to investigate whether superintendent's background demographics impacted student achievement. Lastly, regression analysis was run using superintendent's demographics and student achievement, first using the mean scores on the NYS ELA assessments and again on NYS means scores for the Mathematics assessments.

Summary of Findings

Research question one attempted to answer whether a relationship existed between superintendent's tenure and student achievement. To address this question Pearson's correlations were run using SPSS v. 17.0 software, between student performance on the NYS eighth grade ELA and Mathematics assessments, and superintendent's tenure. The major findings for this question resulted in a positive relationship between superintendent's tenure and student achievement.

Research question two investigated if there were any specific leadership practices/initiatives that positively related to student achievement. Construct validity was analyzed utilizing SPSS v. 17.0, through principal component factor analysis with verimax rotation to determine if the 20 items administered in SLPS could be reduced into a smaller set of variables. The SLPS was reduced to 18 items whereas three summated rating scales could be conceptually and statistically related and therefore grouped together. Pearson's correlation coefficient was performed on three factors identified on the practices/initiates portion of the electronic survey, completed by superintendents, and correlated with student achievement. The scales were named *resources, school community, and leader scale.*

The major findings for research question two were student achievement were

statistically significant when correlated with factors of *resources, school community*

and the *leader scale*. The rating scales based on the SLPS encompassed components

of a school community such as a collaborative goal setting process, BOE aligned

goals for student achievement as well as delivery of instruction, and the allocation of

resources necessary to support said goals.

Research question three attempted to determine whether superintendent's

background demographics related to student achievement. A correlation was run

using SPSS v. 17.0 software, and it was determined there was not a relationship

between the independent (demographics) and dependent (student achievement)

variables. An ANOVA analysis was run using SPSS v.17.0 software. The analysis did

not show a relationship between the demography of superintendents and student

achievement. Tenure was not included in the demographic portion of the question

as research question one had previously established a relationship between tenure

and student achievement.

Finally, research question four asked if a relationship existed between

superintendent's tenure and student achievement when superintendent's

demography and practices/initiatives were taken into account. Superintendents

were asked to respond to an eight question demographic, on-line survey, and data

were compiled into a Micro-soft Excel spreadsheet (used in research question two;

however tenure was added back in). The next 20 questions of the survey asked

superintendents to rate their perceived level of implementation of

practices/initiatives in their district, using a rating scale of one through five, which

were turned into summated scales for research question two. Using SPSS software v. 17.0 a regression analysis was run on the demographic responses, including the summated rating scales from research question two as independent variables and student achievement remained the dependent variable. When regression was run using ELA as a dependent variable, all relevant variables were extracted from the analysis except superintendent's tenure and *resources* from the summated rating scale. The results were very similar when mathematics was the dependent variable except *resources* was the only variable that remained statistically significant. The major finding for research question four was that the rating scale *resources* was a variable that was statistically significant when correlated with student achievement in both ELA as well as Mathematics. Superintendent's tenure had a relationship with achievement in ELA but not on the mathematics assessments. Based on the SLPS, the *resources* scale encompassed components of literacy and intervention programs, BOE and collaborative goal setting process, as well as monitoring goals, professional development, and the school community as a whole.

Conclusions

There has been very little literature published that directly connects the tenure of a school superintendent with student achievement, making it necessary to conduct this research, focused across the small city school districts in NYS. Research question one investigated whether a relationship existed between superintendent's tenure and student achievement. The results of the study suggested that the longevity of superintendents was associated, to some degree, with student achievement, based on three years of data from the NYS eighth grade ELA and

Mathematics assessments. While the influence was relatively small, the results supported the researcher's hypothesis that it was important. An interwoven influence must be exerted between district leaders at all levels of education including building level administrators, teachers, student population/demographics, relationships with the Board of Education, community, and culture of the district. It can be inferred that superintendents, as instructional leaders in their districts, had an effect on some measure of student achievement in his/her district. In order for a district to experience continuous student achievement, sustained leadership was vital. If district leadership was continuously interrupted, student achievement was affected in a way that was not beneficial in the long run. A study conducted in 2006 by Waters & Marzano was able to correlate the effect that superintendent tenure had on student performance. The study used a meta-analysis to determine there were a positive correlation of the two variables of tenure and student achievement as well as a correlation between different leadership responsibilities and student achievement (Waters & Marzano, 2006).

It would seem reasonable, based on these findings, that shorter tenures cut short progressive efforts made by the district leaders and may have an adverse effect on student achievement. The assumption holds true for educators throughout the district, which in turn would yield less effect in the classroom and in the overall results of student achievement. This research demonstrated, in part, the extent to which a superintendent finds success in a district, based on student achievement, rests partially in the amount of time they remain in their position (tenure). When superintendents leave a district, they tend to take their top administrators with them

which may directly impact district initiatives already underway (Sorgi, 2006). The lack of follow through on effective district initiatives will indirectly impact student achievement, if they are not fully implemented by a superintendent's successor. Unfortunately, the trend in superintendent's tenure is not exceptionally long as the average longevity per superintendency is 4.7 years (Fale et al., 2009).

At the completion of the analysis for research question two, student achievement was found to be statistically significant when correlated with multiple factors based on the School Leadership Practice Survey. R*esources, school community and the leader scale* were variables that showed a relationship to student achievement. Based on the findings of this research, the necessary conditions that must be in existence, in order for sustained student achievement was encompassed in the summated rating scales. The rating scales encompassed a collaborative goal setting process, non-negotiable goals for student achievement and instruction (aligned with the BOE goals), as well as the allocation of resources to support nonnegotiable goals. Sound leadership adds value to a school district as well as impacting student achievement (Marzano & Waters, 2009).

Although other factors were considered for research question three, the results of this study indicated that demographic factors including superintendent's age, gender, and career paths did not correlate to student achievement. Superintendents are beginning their first superintendency much later in life which gives them a more compressed time frame in which to become proficient and skilled in that which effects student achievement (Fale et al., 2009). Due to short tenures and a high turnover rate in the superintendency, an innordinate amount of pressure

is placed on the applicant pool which leaves a high need, and low supply of qualified candidates. Although demograpy did not show any relationship to student achievement, longevity did, which was why establishing measures to improve superintendent's longevity was essential in an effort to experience sustained student achievement.

Recommendations for System Leaders

This study explored the relationship between superintendent's tenure and student achievement. An analysis of superintendent length of service and student achievement in the 57 small city school districts across New York State, over a three year period of time was conducted to determine any possible relationship. It was determined that tenure (length of service) had a positive impact on student achievement.

Student achievement is correlated with superintendent's tenure, as stated throughout this research, therefore, measures should be in place for a superintendent to experience a support system comprised of various stakeholders in an effort to support and foster positive working relationships. Every system leader should be paired with a mentor, beginning day one on the job. Mentoring is important enough for NYS to mandate it for teachers, the same should hold true for superintendents.

Roles for the superintendent must be clearly defined with the assistance of the board of education. A system for measuring and evaluating the superintendent's goals should be established. Perhaps the practice of the traditional three year contract may be considered to be extended to five or more years based on an

agreed system of monitoring and evaluating the progress of the superintendent. Lastly, superintendents must be prepared with the academic and leadership skills necessary to foster a learning environment where students' achievement is positively impacted by the tenure of the district leader. Superintendents would benefit if they came equipped with the knowledge and experience of NYS standards as well as NYS assessments. A practice of monitoring and evaluating an aligned K-12 curriculum is a non-negotiable goal that should be set into place at the beginning of a superintendent's tenure in order to maximize the relationship between the superintendent's tenure and student achievement.

System leaders must familiarize themselves with the responsibilities the job of district leader entails. Participating in either a traditional or non-traditional preparation program should be considered before a candidate assumes their first leadership role, as both positive and negative factors of the job must be considered.

Superintendents should research the make-up of the board of education (BOE) guiding the district they are interested in as the relationship with board members is deeply intertwined. This is a vital relationship that may make or break a superintendent's stay as a district leader. Strong relationships with the BOE may lead to a longer tenure and possibly a better focus on sustained student achievement. BOE evaluations may provide a superintendent with greater job security if his/her performance is regularly and effectively assessed by the BOE (Houston & Eadie, 2005). The focus of the evaluation should not be punitive but rather an educational opportunity for all parties to understand one another's perspectives about the nature of the complexity of the job of the school district

leader. School boards are charged with hiring, terminating, and renewing superintendent contracts. Researching the district (dynamics and student achievement) as well as the factors contributing to superintendent turnover in a particular district should be taken into consideration.

System leaders are encouraged to believe in the seriousness and purpose of the leadership position they are seeking. The courage and social conscience to always do what is in the best interest of students is essential as well as the need to set high standards and a system of accountability for oneself as well as staff and students is imperative. Superintendents have a political and social obligation to the community they are serving in which is why investigating the dynamics of the school and social system they may be operating in is essential to learning about core values. The high demands and expectations a community may have for a superintendent should mirror the superintendent's level of commitment to his/her position as well as the dedication to improving and sustaining student achievement.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings presented in this study, the following are recommendations for further research, specifically for those researchers who are interested in the relationship between superintendent's tenure and student achievement.

This study found that superintendent's tenure was positively correlated to student achievement using the NYS eighth grade ELA and Mathematics assessment exams over a three year period of time. It would be valuable to collect data over a longer period of time as well as finding a pool of superintendents who have a longer

tenure than three to five years, as was the majority in this study. It may also be valuable to conduct a longitudinal study, examining the same cohort of eighth grade ELA assessments as well as eleventh grade ELA Regents exams to investigate whether a relationship exists between superintendent's tenure and (student) years of education in the same subject matter over a period of time. The replication of this research, over a longer period of time would assist a researcher in an investigation as to whether longevity impacts student achievement. Many confounding variables were not taken into consideration for this study such as: embargoed data, short tenure of superintendents, community relationships, students' socio-economic status, diverse testing cohorts, BOE relationships with the superintendent, as well as building level administrators and teachers' roles in student achievement. Future research should be conducted on reform strategies utilized by superintendents to create change positively affecting student achievement in small city school districts in New York State. School districts that demonstrate sustained student achievement should be researched in an effort to distinguish what qualities make up a positive and productive environment conducive for teaching and learning.

This study focused on assessments in NYS. It would be valuable to research student achievement based on assessments in states other than New York. Not covered in this research was the effect the overall school district climate and stability played on superintendent's tenure. A study that takes into account, and somehow measures stabilization factors of a school district where students are demonstrating academic achievement would be beneficial to the field of education. Students' socio-economic status (SES) was another factor that was not accounted for

in this research. Analyzing students' SES as well as other factors that play into students' success would assist educators to effectively align the curriculum and programs to better meet students' needs.

Based on this study, stability is a quality that is thought to be beneficial to a district as well as impacting student achievement. Search consultants should try to diversify their pool of candidates and outline the leader's role and responsibilities in order to better prepare a candidate for a leadership role. Research in the realm of recruiting more diverse candidates is essential as is stressing the need for stability in any school district. Pursuing high quality programs to produce high quality candidates may be a mandate NYS may want to consider.

Future research should examine what search consultants and local Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) are doing in an effort to identify the best candidate for a district leadership position. Time may be invested researching potential candidates in a particular area as a means of "tracking them" for a potential job opening. It would be beneficial to investigate how school districts are planning for the succession of their current superintendent, so when he/she departs from their current position, a plan is in place to secure the next district leader. Future research in selected school districts as to the "grooming" of potential district leaders would be beneficial to the field as well. BOCES services may work with school boards to enlighten them on the importance of superintendent and BOE relationships and assist on the essential elements of healthy, productive relationships.

Future researchers could investigate the length of time required for superintendents to give notice of their intent to resign. Perhaps as much as a full

year's notice may provide a school district the opportunity to thoroughly search for the best candidate to succeed the current district leader, as well as allowing time for the two leaders to collaborate on practices/initiatives that are effective and currently implemented throughout the district. Extensive research surrounding current mentoring programs would be beneficial to the field as well as the success rate of superintendents that were mentored and those who were not. Are programs providing opportunities for learning, growing and developing a commitment for leadership? If mentoring has a positive effect on superintendent's tenure, mentoring programs should be mandated and mainstreamed throughout NYS. Investigating evaluation programs for superintendents would be an area for future research as well. A rigorous evaluation process that is well designed and examines the performance of the superintendent, student achievement as well as the relationship with the board of education may extend a leader's stay in a particular district. In this ever-changing, highly complex world of education, superintendents must be able to meet the educational and political needs of school board and community members as well as increasing and sustaining student achievement.

School districts must make significant investments in effective technology in an effort to assist students achieve in the classroom as well as preparing them with the essential 21st Century skills necessary to be productive members of society. Research may be conducted on what the most effective and efficient types of educational technology students benefit most from.

Lastly, positive change leading to student achievement requires involvement of educational staff and community members. The field of education would benefit

from research in methods that foster effective communication with all stakeholders involved in student achievement. Teacher turnover, district budgets and diverse student population should be investigated as to the impact these factors have on student achievement.

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Appendix A

School Leadership Practice Survey

1. Demographics

1. Age:

○ Younger Than 30   ○ 41-45   ○ 56-60

○ 31-35   ○ 46-50   ○ older than 61

○ 36-40   ○ 51-55

2. Gender:

○ Male

○ Female

3. Number of years as a superintendent in current district:

[   ]

4. Years in education (counting this year as a full year)

○ 5 or less   ○ 16-20   ○ 31 or more

○ 6-10   ○ 21-25

○ 11-15   ○ 26-30

5. Last position as an educator before becoming an administrator (building or district level):

○ elementary teacher

○ middle-level teacher

○ high school teacher

○ guidance counselor

Other (please specify) [   ]

6. Years of experience as an educator before becoming an administrator (building or district level):

○ 5 or less

○ 6-10

○ 11-15

○   16-20

○   21 or more

7. Last position held before becoming a superintendent:

○   teacher

○   assistant principal

○   principal

○   director

○   assistant superintendent

Other (please specify) [   ]

8. Years of experience as a building level administrator:

○   5 or less

○   6-10

○   11-15

○   16-20

○   21-25

○   26 or more

School Leadership Practice Survey
Exit this survey

2. School Leader Practice Survey

Directions: The following statements describe practices and initiatives related to school district leadership. The School Leader Practice survey (SLPS) enables you, as a superintendent, to be reflective about the importance of various aspects of your practice. Within your role as practicing NYS small city public school superintendent, please indicate the level of implementation (using a five-point rating scale) to which each initiative/practice is occurring in your district.

1. A K-12 aligned curriculum.

○   1. not implemented

○   2. rarely implemented

○   3. somewhat implemented

○   4. mostly implemented

○ 5. fully implemented

2. A research based early intervention literacy program.

○ 1. not implemented

○ 2. rarely implemented

○ 3. somewhat implemented

○ 4. mostly implemented

○ 5. fully implemented

3. An effective Academic Intervention Services (AIS)program that addresses students' academic needs.

○ 1. not implemented

○ 2. rarely implemented

○ 3. somewhat implemented

○ 4. mostly implemented

○ 5. fully implemented

4. Board of Education alignment and support of district goals.

○ 1. not implemented

○ 2. rarely implemented

○ 3. somewhat implemented

○ 4. mostly implemented

○ 5. fully implemented

5. Stakeholders are involved in decisions affecting schools.

○ 1. not implemented

○ 2. rarely implemented

○ 3. somewhat implemented

○ 4. mostly implemented

○ 5. fully implemented

6. A collaborative goal setting process.

○ 1. not implemented

○ 2. rarely implemented

○ 3. somewhat implemented

○ 4. mostly implemented

○ 5. fully implemented

7. Non-negotiable goals for all educators.

   ○ 1. not implemented

   ○ 2. rarely implemented

   ○ 3. somewhat implemented

   ○ 4. mostly implemented

   ○ 5. fully implemented

8. A system to monitor and evaluate district goals for instruction and student achievement.

   ○ 1. not implemented

   ○ 2. rarely implemented

   ○ 3. somewhat implemented

   ○ 4. mostly implemented

   ○ 5. fully implemented

9. The use of resources to support student achievement and instructional goals.

   ○ 1. not implemented

   ○ 2. rarely implemented

   ○ 3. somewhat implemented

   ○ 4. mostly implemented

   ○ 5. fully implemented

10. Professional development that promotes a focus on student learning.

   ○ 1. not implemented

   ○ 2. rarely implemented

   ○ 3. somewhat implemented

   ○ 4. mostly implemented

   ○ 5. fully implemented

11. Opportunities for staff to develop collaborative skills are provided.

   ○ 1. not implemented

   ○ 2. rarely implemented

   ○ 3. somewhat implemented

   ○ 4. mostly implemented

   ○ 5. fully implemented

12. The vision and mission of the district are effectively communicated to staff, parents, students, and community members.

- ○ 1. not implemented
- ○ 2. rarely implemented
- ○ 3. somewhat implemented
- ○ 4. mostly implemented
- ○ 5. fully implemented

13. The school community is involved in school improvement efforts.

- ○ 1. not implemented
- ○ 2. rarely implemented
- ○ 3. somewhat implemented
- ○ 4. mostly implemented
- ○ 5. fully implemented

14. Partnerships are established with area businesses, institutions of higher education, and community groups to strengthen programs and support school goals.

- ○ 1. not implemented
- ○ 2. rarely implemented
- ○ 3. somewhat implemented
- ○ 4. mostly implemented
- ○ 5. fully implemented

15. Diversity is considered in developing learning experiences.

- ○ 1. not implemented
- ○ 2. rarely implemented
- ○ 3. somewhat implemented
- ○ 4. mostly implemented
- ○ 5. fully implemented

16. There is a culture of high expectations for self, student, and staff performance.

- ○ 1. not implemented
- ○ 2. rarely implemented
- ○ 3. somewhat implemented
- ○ 4. mostly implemented

○ 5. fully implemented

17. Technologies are used in teaching and learning.

○ 1. not implemented

○ 2. rarely implemented

○ 3. somewhat implemented

○ 4. mostly implemented

○ 5. fully implemented

18. Pupil personnel programs are developed to meet the needs of students and their families.

○ 1. not implemented

○ 2. rarely implemented

○ 3. somewhat implemented

○ 4. mostly implemented

○ 5. fully implemented

19. District leader demonstrates values, beliefs, and attitudes that inspire others to higher levels of performance.

○ 1. not implemented

○ 2. rarely implemented

○ 3. somewhat implemented

○ 4. mostly implemented

○ 5. fully implemented

20. District policies, practices, and procedures are open to public scrutiny.

○ 1. not implemented

○ 2. rarely implemented

○ 3. somewhat implemented

○ 4. mostly implemented

○ 5. fully implemented

Essential Components of the ISLLC Standards (Green, 2009)

Standard 1: A Vision of Learning
1. Facilitation
2. Challenges
3. Strategic Planning
4. Leadership Capacity
5. Stakeholder Involvement

Standard 2: School, Community, and Teaching and Learning
1. Culture
2. Instructional Program
3. Student Learning
4. Professional Growth

Standard 3: Managing School Operations
1. Coordinating
2. Organizing
3. Planning
4. Resource Allocation & Management
5. Ensuring Safe Schools

Standard 4: Building Effective Interpersonal Relationships
1. Respecting Diversity
2. Assessing Community Interests and Needs
3. Utilizing Community Resources
4. Collaboration

Standard 5: Leading with Integrity in a Fair and Ethical Manner
1. Integrity
2. Fairness
3. Ethics

Standard 6: Understanding the Political, Social, Economic, and Legal Context
1. Political
2. Social
3. Economic
4. Legal
5. Culture

Appendix C

Letter from Smith

From: Melody Smith
Date: 10/29/2009 08:11 AM
To: Lori Caplan
Subject: Permission

Ms. Caplan,

It is with great pleasure that I allow you to use my dissertation study and specifically
the School Leader Practice Survey (SLPS) designed from the ISLLC Standards
Performance Indicators to complete your dissertation study. Page 189 (Appendix R)
will reveal permission I received for the original study/survey design from the 2007
Director of ISLLC Standards, Ms. Nancy Sanders.

Good luck with your study. I look forward to reading it in the near future.

Dr. Melody A. Smith
Superintendent of Schools
St. Joseph School District
925 Felix Street
St. Joseph, MO 64501
phone: 816-671-4000

Appendix D

Letter from Adams-Rogers

From: Lois Adams-Rodgers
Date: 10/29/2009 11:59 AM
To: Lori Caplan
Subject: FW: ISSLC indicators

Hi Lori. I am happy to help you. My name is Lois Adams-Rodgers, and I am Deputy
Executive Director here at CCSSO. The ISLLC (Interstate School Leadership
Licensure Consortium) standards are posted on our website. They are ISLLC, 2008,
and you just need to make attribution to the standards as ISLLC, 2008, from the
Council of Chief State School Officers. The website is www.ccsso.org and you will
find them under projects, Education Leadership. I am not familiar with the Missouri
Survey tool, but it appears they have given you permission to use it, and the use of
the ISLLC Standards is fine with us.
I hope this is what you need. Best of luck with your work.

Appendix E

Letter from Biggerstaff

October 29,2009

Dear Superintendents of the Small City School Districts of NYS:

I am writing this letter in support of the research being conducted by Miss Lori S. Caplan (a principal in one of our small city districts, Watervliet CSD) as partial fulfillment of her EdD at Sage College in Albany. She has my permission and support to survey the 57 superintendents in the small city school districts in NYS.

Lori is researching the effects of superintendents' longevity on student achievement in small city school districts in NYS. This study will contribute to the research that has previously been conducted on superintendents' longevity and its impact on student achievement.

Miss Caplan has offered to share her research findings upon completion of her EdD.

Thank you for your participation.

Robert E. Biggerstaff

Executive Director and General Counsel, NYSASCSD

Appendix F

Invitation to Participate

Dear Superintendents:

I am a doctoral candidate in Educational Leadership at The Sage Colleges in Albany New York, and the Jr/Sr High School Principal of the Watervliet City School District. I am currently conducting a study on the relationship between superintendents' longevity and student achievement in Small City School Districts in New York State. This study has the support and permission of Robert Biggerstaff and is being conducted under the supervision and guidance of Dr. Daniel Alemu, Assistant Professor in Educational Leadership at The Sage Colleges, Graduate School in Albany, New York.

The purpose of this quantitative study is to investigate a possible relationship between superintendents' longevity and student achievement using the School Leadership Practice Survey (SLPS) developed by Dr. Melody Smith. The electronic survey will only take a few moments of your valuable time.

There are no risks in your participating and your responses will be confidential and reported as a group, not as an individual. Your responses will be beneficial in this field of study and I would be glad to share my research findings with anyone who expresses an interest in reading my dissertation.

Thank you in advance for your participation and time to assist me in this research.

Lori S. Caplan

EdD Candidate, Sage Graduate School of Education

Principal of Watervliet Jr/Sr High School

lcaplan@vliet.neric.org