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The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the perceptions of the professional development needs of superintendents as leaders of a complex organization in rural schools. The study gives voice to 12 superintendents who serve rural North Carolina students. The goal was to develop a professional development blueprint which will provide a nexus of support for superintendents. The Professional Development blueprint gives direction to partners: state government official and policymakers, higher education, state and national organization, corporate providers, and superintendents.

The study used a qualitative methodology as the research approach. The researcher used face-to-face interviews to collect data for the study. Twelve rural North Carolina Superintendents from across all regions of the state participated in the study. The data collected through the interview process allowed for an understanding of the collective professional development needs of rural North Carolina Superintendents to effectively lead rural school districts that are, by definition, complex organizations.

The data collected were analyzed and common themes surfaced to demonstrate the professional development topics, preferred delivery methods, and the support structures superintendents use to meet their professional development needs. Results from the analysis show that superintendents need professional development on tactical, managerial, and leadership development. Superintendents generally choose what professional development activities in which to participate with few barriers that are not self-imposed. Superintendents are willing to use a range of delivery vehicles to receive

professional development but overwhelmingly prefer face-to-face delivery. Three general themes emerged from the data. Superintendents feel strongly that mentorship and networking are critical support structures and most felt the principalship was a vital experience to succeed as a superintendent. The study concludes with recommendations and a “how to” blueprint to best meet the professional development needs of superintendents in each stage/tier of their development.

NORTH CAROLINA RURAL SUPERINTENDENTS PERCEIVED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

by

David Wade Taylor

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Approved by

Carl Lashley
Committee Chair

I make this dedication to my mother, Ann A. Taylor and father, Billy Ray Taylor, who always believed in me. They both gave me the work ethic and foundations to be successful in life. They both taught me that nothing was impossible if you worked hard enough and they have always been my north star.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation, written by David Wade Taylor, has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

> Leadership is at its heart a critical practice . . . (it) is oriented not just toward the development of more perfect organizational structures, but toward a reconceptualization of life practices where common ideals of freedom and democracy stand important. (Foster, 1989, p. 52)

Public schools are critical to our nation's future. The preparation infrastructure to accomplish these tasks is complex school systems that have governmental, public, and moral mandates to prepare our students to be successful in the everchanging global society (Kahlenberg & Janey, 2017). At the forefront of this complex organization is the superintendent. The superintendent sets the direction and tone within a school system while responding to the often-competing demands of the local school board, administrators, teachers, parents, students, and members of the community.

Historically, the first job expectation of a superintendent has involved managerial functions and responsibilities that may not have a direct influence on student learning. These functions and responsibilities have included budgeting, procuring, personnel, facilities, public relations, grievance proceedings, board secretary, and business and industry liaison. All of these role functions are essential to a district or unit being well managed (Waters & Marzano, 2006). The superintendent must also attend to and focus on issues related to teaching and learning. After all, the primary purpose of schools is to impact student learning. Today's superintendent must have a clear vision for the district;

value community input; provide strong instructional leadership; communicate effectively; manage and monitor progress; evaluate performance; evoke listening skills and habits to make sound decisions; set goals putting programs and resources in place to achieve those goals; manage the politics of the job; direct funding resources while adapting to changes in state and federal funding; acclimate to changes in the school community while not sacrificing the district's vision; and work to take a collaborative versus a confrontational approach to leadership (Waters & Marzano, 2006).

The superintendency is a demanding job that requires staying abreast of current research and best leadership practices. The superintendent must know his/her strengths and weaknesses while continually striving to grow personally and professionally. Ongoing high-quality professional development can aid the superintendent in examining his/her leadership to better meet fluctuating student needs as they prepare for the challenges of a technologically advanced global society.

New performance assessments, increased student performance expectations, curriculum frameworks, and changes in school organization call for new forms of professional development that can assist superintendents in developing new skills and strategies to effect change in practice. Professional development is essential to personal and professional growth and must be seen as an investment in lifelong learning for all educators, including the superintendent (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Educators and researchers have long suggested that quality professional development must be continual and focused in nature and substance (e.g., Abu-Tineh & Sadiq, 2018). Professional

development includes multiple forms of learning intended to be relevant to superintendents as well as supportive of district plans for organizational improvement.

Through varied opportunities for professional development, superintendents can continue to learn both inside and outside of their districts while networking with job-alike colleagues and other professionals who hold or fully understand the complex role of the superintendency. Given the fact that current times have left superintendents throughout the nation feeling more isolated and vulnerable than ever, professional development needs both individually and collectively are mostly unknown (Jazzar & Kimball, 2004). In this study, I define superintendent professional development as a leadership growth-promoting learning process that empowers superintendents to improve the educational organization.

Statement of the Problem

Today's superintendents must be systems thinkers (Fullan, 2005). Superintendents must internally make the connection and alignment of all the district's discrete parts and the relationship among the parts. "An organization's ability to learn may make the difference between its thriving or perishing," says author Peter Senge (as cited in O'Neil, 1995, p. 20). To be a systems thinker and leader in a complex organization, one must fully understand the web of organizational interdependencies, which include formal organizational structure, informal structures, and organizational politics, and be able to differentiate his/her role in each.

In my informal conversations with superintendents throughout the years, many have indicated that the traditional approach to helping educators learn has typically been

to develop skills to manage independent elements of work. In North Carolina professional development for a superintendent has been in the form of skills-based training or management. Superintendents have not been offered specific professional development on how to develop themselves as organizational leaders. In North Carolina, this comes in the form of scheduled updates from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) and other agencies and organizations—North Carolina Association of School Administrations (NCASA), North Carolina Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (NCASCD), American Association of School Administrators (AASA), North Carolina School Boards Association (NCSBA), North Carolina Association of School Superintendents (NCSSA), etc.

As a systems leader of a complex organization, the superintendent must fully understand the concept of leadership—the ability to provide direction and influence (Northouse, 2007). To be an effective leader, a superintendent must also know his/her motivations, values, desires, talents, and strengths to enhance the collective capacity of people in the organization to create and pursue overall goals and visions (Senge, 2006). Leadership and management are different skill sets. Management is the efficient use of systems and processes to organize and execute.

Warren Bennis tells us that leadership begins with knowing and leading oneself (Bennis, 2009). The process of developing as a leader is intertwined with personal development. This is why knowing oneself is the foundation of successful leadership. Bennis in *On Becoming a Leader* writes,

> No leader sets out to be a leader. People set out to live their lives, expressing themselves fully. When that expression is of value, they become leaders. So, the point is not to become a leader. The point is to become yourself, to use yourself completely—all your skills, gifts and energies—in order to make your vision manifest. You must withhold nothing. You must become the person you started out to be and enjoy the process of becoming. (p. 137)

Leaders, therefore, cannot begin to lead without a good understanding of who they are and without the distraction and noise of who the world thinks they are and should be. Kouzes and Posner (2011) postulate that leadership begins with an inner journey. Being knowledgeable of oneself becomes the underpinning of truth, purpose, authenticity, and character. They write, "The quest for leadership, therefore, is first an inner quest to discover who you are and what you care about, and it's through this process of self-examination that you find the awareness needed to lead" (p. 22). Having a deep understanding of who they are and where they are going provides the context for where and how people lead. High-quality professional development is a means to support this deep understanding of self.

According to the Hanover Research Brief (2014), North Carolina superintendents do not have access to consistent high-quality professional development focused on the complex role of leadership. As I approached my research topic, I determined the Hanover findings to hold true when I informally asked 19 North Carolina superintendents participating in an executive leadership development program about their access to high-quality professional development for personal and professional growth. The consensus was that few options were available to superintendents and that a substantial need exists for more support (D. Taylor, personal communication, October 26, 2016). Currently,

North Carolina offers quasi-professional development (skills-based) to superintendents via the North Carolina Association of School Administrators (NCASA), the North Carolina School Superintendents' Association (NCSSA) and NCDPI (NCDPI, n.d.). While NCSSA and NCDPI offer professional development for superintendents on a regular basis, the delivered professional development is not sustained or targeted toward the leadership growth of the superintendents who lead large complex organizations.

Professional development offered by each of the three stated organizations focuses on managing a school district along with education industry updates on current topics rather than on professional development as a leadership growth-promoting learning process. For example, during the March 30-31, 2017 at the Grandover Resort & Conference Center for the 2017 Conference on Educational Leadership, NCASA offered sessions around challenges versus opportunity. The 32 sessions (managing the organization) focused on districts that have succeeded in the face of adversity and a keynote speaker, Freedom Writer Manny Scott delivering a message of hope. The conference included legislative updates (education industry updates) from the Governor, State superintendent, and two NC House Representatives. It also hosted two keynote speakers from High Point University in the Education Policy Arena (North Carolina Association of School Administrators, 2017).

The Next Generation Superintendents' program offered by NCSSA is an introductory leadership program for beginning North Carolina superintendents. Mr. Jack Hoke, Executive Director and organizer for the program, said the state is averaging a 23% superintendent turnover rate each year, which necessitates the need for the program

(J. Hoke, personal communication, March 2017). The program consists of eight in-person training days dispersed throughout the year and is offered to superintendents serving in their first five years as superintendent. The training includes networking with colleagues, having conversations with thought partners—superintendents who have already been through the program—exchanging ideas about issues, and getting instruction on matters where further training may be needed (North Carolina Association of School Administrators, 2017).

Another such example is the superintendents' North Carolina Digital Learning Institute (NCDLI) supported by NCDPI in collaboration with the Friday Institute at North Carolina State University (FINCSU). NCSSA selects one cohort of superintendents each year to participate in 4 days of face-to-face sessions. The agenda for this professional development offering includes sessions on understanding, planning for the major elements, and leading personalized and digital learning in their districts (Friday Institute, n.d.).

The offerings in North Carolina as proposed by the professional organizations to which a superintendent may belong do not adequately address the needs of leaders in these complex organizations. The offerings currently proposed by NCDPI and NCSSA focus on subject matter expertise development or professional expertise development. The offerings such as Digital Leadership and Next Generation Superintendents focus on a subset of the entire state (North Carolina School Superintendent Association, n.d.). In informal discussions with North Carolina superintendents, they indicated that superintendents need professional development in leader development, leadership

development, managerial development, and professional subject matter expertise development.

The superintendent is the internal and external face of the district. As a result, the superintendent must set expectations, vision the future, and build the path to get there. The role of a superintendent is by its very nature complex. The current and future state of the superintendency will require increasing support, mentoring, and leadership development. The opportunities to access high-quality leadership development seem to be rare, leaving many superintendents ill-equipped to lead at the forefront of this vast complex organization (McCord, 2009).

Clearly, the offerings in North Carolina as proposed by the professional organizations to which a superintendent may belong are attempting to help address the needs of leaders in complex organizations. They also align my unstructured informal conversations with the research conducted on the Continuing Education for superintendents (Hannover Research Brief, July 2014, p. 3):

1. Professional development opportunities targeted toward superintendents and assistant superintendents are few.
2. Professional development for superintendents should be formalized, based on national standards, and flexible enough to be tailored to superintendents' evolving needs.
3. Professional development programs offered by Education Service Agencies (ESAs) vary substantially, and there is a lack of continuity across ESAs'

professional development offerings, resulting in the absence of a ‘standard’ set of offerings.

4. The most common professional development topics addressed by ESAs in the United States include executive leadership, financial management, and legal issues affecting the district.

Despite knowing that the superintendent is the face of the district and must lead with a systems approach, trends and their implications for increasing support, mentoring, and leadership development seem to be rare, leaving many superintendents ill-equipped to lead at the forefront of this complex organization (McCord, 2009).

Purpose of the Research

Public schools are the critical infrastructure in which our nation’s future is developed (Vincent, 2006). As leaders of public schools, superintendents set the direction and tone for the complex organizations. Leadership of public schools is a significant responsibility. The responsibility and leadership scope of a superintendent makes it essential that high-quality professional development that best meets the superintendent’s unique needs be accessible.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of professional development needs of superintendents as leaders of a complex organization in rural schools. Based on the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) Center National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) during the 2013–2014 school year nationally, 6% of all public-school districts were in cities, 23% were in suburban areas, 18% were in small towns, and 53% were located in rural areas. In North Carolina during the 2013–2014

school year, almost 10% of all public-school districts were in cities, 13% were in suburban areas, 12% were in small towns, and 65% were located in rural areas. Since more than one-half of the schools in NC are rural in nature, I chose to focus my study on rural superintendents. Focusing on rural superintendents allowed me to impact the largest group of superintendents in North Carolina (USDOE, 2015).

In order to conduct this study about North Carolina rural superintendents perceived professional development needs, these research questions were utilized:

1. What do practice rural North Carolina superintendents perceive their professional development needs to be in leading a complex organization?
2. How do practicing rural North Carolina superintendents get their professional development needs met and how do they decide what to participate in for leadership growth?
3. Are there unique professional development needs for rural novice superintendents (less than five years' experience) compared to more experienced rural superintendents (greater than five years' experience)?
4. What types of professional development delivery best meet the needs of practicing rural superintendents and to what extent are their needs met?

The Significance of the Study

Superintendents of both urban and rural communities lead complex organizations. Complex organizations by definition have many people, processes, rules, strategies, and basic units within the structure of the organization. Complex organizations depend on leaders who have the responsibility of communicating and carrying out the vision and

mission of the organization (Bolman & Deal, 1991, 2017; Galbraith, 1973; Glass & Franceshini, 2007; Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2002; Scott, 2003). This position by its very nature is nestled in isolation. Superintendents face ever-changing pressures that require leadership skills that are adaptable for unknown, politically charged, multifaceted mandates. Superintendents need tools to help withstand the constant and intense scrutiny of living within a "fishbowl" environment (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). This leads superintendents to express a need for increased professional development for leading in the complex environment of accountability and political chaos that often characterizes school districts (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). This study is significant in that I captured the perceptions of practicing rural superintendents regarding the state of professional development in leading a complex organization. The resulting analysis could be used to create national, state, regional and university offerings in superintendent professional development that would be aligned with superintendent expectations.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is a visual metaphor that describes the study (Glesne, 2016). Gubrium and Harper (2013) indicated diagrams and visuals can be used as "elicitation tools for discussion" (p. 32). Figure 1 is an illustration of how this study was conceptualized. The figure represents how each portion of this study was developed. The funnel represents the flow of the rural superintendent's perceived professional needs. Running through the funnel are three major components all intermixing with systems thinking—the role and position of the superintendent, leading a complex organization,

and rural district challenges. Finally, the backdrop to which all moving parts are embedded is situated in Complexity Leadership Theory.

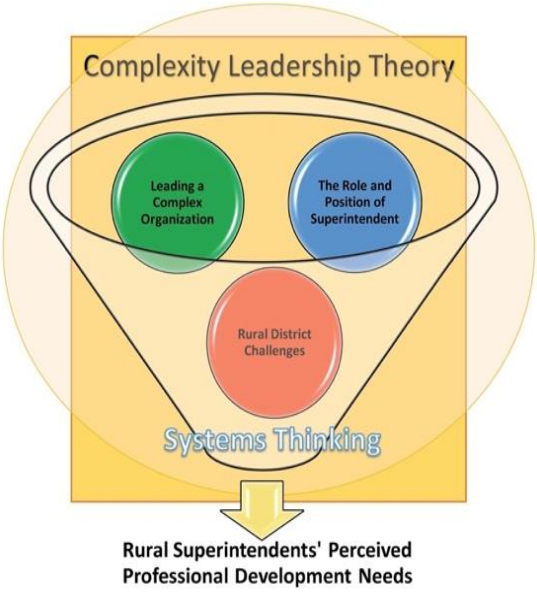

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework.

The output of the funnel may be subject to the lived experiences (natural setting) of the superintendent participants on any given day with direct influence and perceptions (human behavior) based on the scope, size, direction, and sequence of the moving balls. The output includes more than just the professional development needs of the superintendent. Other outputs may include political lessons learned, communication best practices, lived experiences, expertise in school district operations, and leadership skills. These outputs if used in the context of systems thinking allow a structured or systems approach to problem-solving and organizational effectiveness. Additionally, the outputs of the funnel align nicely with the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders established by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (2015). While

all of the outputs are of interest, this study focused on what professional development needs superintendents perceive as necessary to navigate and lead a school district which by nature is a complex organization.

Key Concepts and Terms

In an attempt to help the reader, understand and gain the most from this research study, it is necessary to define a few terms. These terms are used and expanded upon throughout the study

1. Complexity Leadership Theory: a leadership paradigm that focuses on enabling the learning, creative, and adaptive capacity of complex adaptive systems (CAS) within a context of knowledge-producing organizations (school districts) (Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007).
2. Complex Organizations: organizations that have many people, processes, rules, strategies, and basic roles. Complex organizations depend on an extended group of leaders who have the responsibility of articulating and carrying out the mission of the organization (Scott, 2003).
3. Leadership: the ability to provide direction and influence (Northouse, 2007).
4. Professional development: a leadership growth-promoting learning process that empowers stakeholders to improve the educational organization (Baldwin & Padgett, 1994; Keys & Wolfe, 1988; Wexley & Baldwin, 1986).
5. Rural: all territories outside of urban areas with a population density of fewer than 2,500 people per square mile and an overall density of less than 10,000 to 50,000 people (NCES, 2016).

6. Systems Thinking: a management discipline that involves an understanding of a system by canvassing the relationships and interplay between the segments that encompass the entirety of that defined system (Senge, 2006).

Summary

Chapter I included background information regarding the need for superintendent professional development for student learning and the purpose for conducting this study. The significance of the study was discussed and definitions of key concepts and terms relevant to this study were provided in this chapter. Chapter II contains a review of literature exploring background information related to the public school superintendency and the role of the contemporary superintendent, complex organizations including systems thinking and Complexity Leadership Theory, professional development in the context of leadership, adult learning theory, superintendent turnover, North Carolina professional development opportunities, and the rural superintendency. This chapter includes empirical studies, meta-analyses, and literature surrounding the superintendency, the professional development needs of leading complex organizations, the conceptual framework for the study, and leading in rural America. Chapter III provides details regarding the methodology I used to gain an understanding of North Carolina rural superintendents' perceptions of their professional development needs. Chapter IV captures the data producing themes and providing answers to my research questions. Finally, Chapter V concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the study, recommendations, areas for future research, a Superintendent Professional Development Blueprint, and my closing thoughts.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

> The key to growth is the introduction of higher dimensions of consciousness into our awareness
>
> ~ Lao Tzu

In this chapter, I will present a review of extant literature that focuses on public rural superintendents leading complex organizations and professional development in the context of leadership. The purpose of this research was to determine rural superintendent perceptions of their own professional development needs. This review of literature is divided into the following sections:

- Public School Superintendency,
- Complex Organizations,
- Professional Development in the Context of Leadership,
- Adult Learning Theory,
- Superintendent Turnover,
- North Carolina Professional Development Opportunities, and
- Rural Superintendency Needs.

The first section explores the public school superintendency from inception to current training, duties, challenges, and development. The second section critiques the superintendency through the lens of complex organizations with a discussion on systems thinking and Complexity Leadership Theory. Context defining professional development

is provided in the third section, with the fourth section focused on adult learning. In section five, job turnover nationally and specific to North Carolina superintendents is reviewed. Current professional development offerings for North Carolina superintendents are surveyed in section six with the final section focusing on the rural superintendency. Each section of this literature review is meant to serve as conceptual knowledge to understand the complex role and development needs of the rural superintendent.

The Public School Superintendency

The superintendent of schools is a position that is barely understood but has wide-ranging influence. Research speaks to the position in very broad terms while the daily harsh political realities of leading a school district are scarcely conceptualized. When hearing the title superintendent, communities of yesteryear would conjure up pictures of a "statesman"—a guiding light through which an educational statesman functions as a leadership strategist (Callahan, 1967). This image no longer holds true of today's superintendents. Pressures from multiple sources, many times occurring simultaneously from unrelenting parent calls, increased school reform mandates, everchanging legal and political contexts, ceaseless accountability, demands for more student support services, clamoring of special interest groups, and the continued decline in funding resources depicts the harsh realities of today's superintendent, whose role is moving toward an uncertain future (Björk & Keedy, 2001; Cibulka, 1995; Rowan & Miskel, 1999).

History of the Superintendency

At first inception, public schools were the responsibility of the state and governed by state boards. Local lay boards had purview over the schools with school functions varying based on community conceptions and needs. The position of superintendent materialized a decade or so after the formation of public schools. The position was formalized at the beginning of the nineteenth century when an accounting system to oversee the funding from state legislatures was needed. At first, the legislature allowed volunteer committees to serve in this role. As time passed, these committees led to the formation of state and local boards of education. In fact, Massachusetts, which is considered the birthplace of public education because of Horace Mann, still calls its school boards "school committees" (R. I. Johnson, 2004).

Thomas Jefferson, in 1779, formally created the concept of local school boards by the proposal of legislation to the Virginia Assembly for the election of three aldermen of each county to have general charge of the schools. The proposal also included the role of an overseer for every ten school districts to appoint and supervise teachers and students. From this proposal, the superintendency was born, and many school boards hired a person to run the daily operations of the school(s). By the 1960s there were more than 35,000 superintendents nationally, viewed by many as the most influential person in the school district and the highest profile member of the community. As communities mobilized around the school districts, state and federal actions politicized boards and positions materialized, thus expanding, politicizing, and deepening the role and

expectations of the position of superintendent. Superintendents became viewed as communicators of complex organizations (Kowalski, 2011).

Callahan (1967) espoused four stages in the evolution of the American Superintendency and describes them in roles that are distinctly conceptualized: scholarly leaders (1850-1900), business managers (1900-1930), educational statesmen (1930-1950), and social scientist (1950-1967). The modern superintendency is adding political strategist to the array of historical roles the superintendent has played. This new role in an increasingly complex and broadly political nature of schooling (Björk & Kowalski, 2005) is becoming necessary to effectively lead.

The scholarly leaders served to "have a person work full-time supervising classroom instruction and assuring uniformity of curriculum" (Spring, 1990, p. 141). Superintendent candidates during this time were mainly males who were viewed as excellent teachers. There was no formal academic degrees or training for the role of superintendent. Superintendents were head educators, subordinate to the board members but a leader to school principals, all teachers, and students (Kowalski, 2013). They supervised employees and gave counsel to the school board via requested written and oral reports (Gilland, 1935). The escalation of the superintendent role during this period was slow because local boards of education were worried that the superintendent would amass political power at their expense. When local boards of education eventually hired a superintendent, they often were slow to give this person authority over financial and personnel decisions (Carter & Cunningham, 1997). This reluctance to concede power was particularly prevalent in large school districts.

Superintendents in large city school districts were viewed as scholars due to the frequency of professional journal articles about philosophy, history, and pedagogy they wrote and published (Cuban, 1988). The description of superintendent as teacher-scholar was explained in an 1890 report on urban superintendents as published in 1907 by the National Education Association of the United States, Addresses, and Proceedings (Vol. 45): "It must be made his recognized duty to train teachers and inspire them with high ideals; to revise the course of study when new light shows that improvement is possible; to see that pupils and teachers are supplied with needed appliances for the best possible work; to devise rational methods of promoting pupils" (Cuban, 1976, p. 16).

The tenets of the Industrial Revolution with classical theories rooted in the foundations of scientific management helped shape the business manager view of the superintendent role. The populous and a clear majority of school boards, especially in major urban school districts, looked to industry for ideas on how to produce technical efficiency. It was believed the concepts of industrial efficiency could be just as valid applied to public schools (Kowalski, 2011). The new view of superintendents as business managers led some school boards to elevate the superintendent's managerial skills versus teaching competencies (Kowalski, 2011).

College professors and superintendents of the major urban districts worked to institutionalize the business management conceptualization of the role of the superintendent. Before the early 1900s, university courses in Educational Administration did not appear in the curriculum (Cubberley, 1924). After 1910, educational administration courses were created at Columbia University's Teachers College.

Gradually, professors at other institutions began to develop a specialization in educational administration. Historians who study education agree that the role of superintendent as business manager produced what can be described as a *control core culture*. This *control core culture* can be characterized as an impersonal, authoritative, and task-oriented set of values and beliefs (Callahan, 1962).

The Great Depression produced a new view of the role of the superintendent. The collapse of the stock market caused the public and boards of education to lose faith in industrial management capacity to solve problems. After 1930, citizens became increasingly skeptical of the premise that superintendents should wield more authority and power at the expense of local citizen control (Kowalski, 2013). The worries about centralization, managerial authority, and oversight gave rise to the role of the superintendent as the educational statesman. The statesman role was encapsulated in the idea of a democratic administration of public schools. The concept was championed by Ernest Melby, who was a dean of education at Northwestern University and New York University (Callahan, 1967). Ernest Melby espoused that the local community was public education's greatest resource. He urged administrators to "release the creative capacities of individuals" and "mobilize the educational resources of communities" (Melby, 1955, p. 250). As an educational statesman, a superintendent was expected to galvanize support for education (Kowalski, 2011).

Ten years after the end of World War II, the role of the superintendent as a statesman was being disparaged as overly idealistic and incapable of providing solutions to complex contemporary social and economic dilemmas. Detractors argued that

superintendents who embodied this role of the superintendent as an educational statesman were focused on the political world. Critics wanted superintendents to pay more attention to the emerging social sciences (Kowalski, 2011). As post World War II society began to struggle with demographic changes, an increase in the number of school-age children created new suburban school districts. Collectively, the changes in our society created a new view of the superintendent as an applied social scientist (Callahan, 1962). The social scientist was one who not only possessed but wanted "a greater sensitivity to large social problems through an interdisciplinary approach involving most of the social sciences" (Kellogg Foundation, 1961, p. 13). In this new role as applied social scientists, superintendents were expected to solve education problems that occur in a multicultural, democratic society by using empiricism, predictability, and scientific certainty. As this new role spread, the professional preparation of superintendents became less practice-based and more theoretical (Fusarelli & Fusarelli, 2005). Unfortunately, change in role and preparation to accommodate the view of superintendents as applied scientists created superintendents who were "high-level technicians, an expert at keeping their organization going but not equipped to see or understand where they are going" (Kowalski, 2011, p. 227).

Today's superintendents as political strategists are communicators of the district's strategic and tactical vision and goals. This new communication requirement came because of a confluence of reform initiatives. Stakeholders, parents, teachers and even students demand more because of the information-based society in which we live. Social media and the communication expectations have transformed the communicative

behavior of superintendents (Kowalski, 2013). This new role as the communicator requires superintendents to build and maintain positive communication channels with many different audiences simultaneously.

Over the past 130 years, the superintendency has evolved from a teacher-scholar to a communicator. Each of these changes has been due in large part to a change in our society, usually based on social or political events. As our world continues to change, becomes more interconnected, politicized and complex, so does our education system. Leading such an education system will require the superintendent, as the top political strategist, to be an effective communicator who continually evolves to meet the diverse needs of a complex organization.

The Contemporary Superintendent

As described above, the role of superintendent has morphed over time. Today the superintendent position entails a compilation of a teacher-scholar, business manager, democratic statesman/leader, applied social scientist, and an effective communicator (Kowalski, 2013). As teacher-scholars, superintendents are expected to provide academic and instructional leadership to improve schools by evaluating curriculum and instruction. The business manager role today is one where the superintendent places procedures and practices to control human and material resources and ensure school safety. The statesman and democratic leader engages stakeholders with the strategic planning, visioning, and garnering of the resources necessary to execute the vision and direction of the local board of education. The superintendent, in the capacity of an applied social scientist, makes data-driven decisions about complex instructional and

curricular issues. Finally, the role of the political strategist as an effective communicator has become more critical than ever. The act of building stakeholder buy-in on programs, projects, and performance and communicating a vision and direction for the school district are now essential for survival and success (Kowalski, 2013).

The contemporary superintendent's role has evolved as a direct result of the impact of numerous reform efforts from the 1983 publication of *A Nation at Risk*, to the controversial 2002 *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB), to the 2014 adoption and publicly debated *Common Core Standards*, and now to the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) passed in December 2015. Public education and its purpose are being redefined from the self-actualization of the individual and preparation of next generations for active participation in a democratic society to only preparing children for the workforce. Among the many critics of current reform efforts is a former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Education, who writes that in the past,

> Education reformers thought deeply about the relationship between school and society. They thought about child development as the starting point for education. In those days, education reformers recognized the important role of the family in the education of children. But that was long ago . . . The debates about the role of schooling in a democratic society, the lives of children and families, and the relationship between schools and society were relegated to the margins as no longer relevant to the business plan to reinvent American education. (Ravitch, 2013, p. 18)

These shifts are an attempt by the federal government to centralize education policymaking, through NCLB mandates and use of Race to the Top grants to leverage adoption of reforms, has had a significant impact on the role and expectations for today's superintendents (Björk, Browne-Ferrigno, & Kowalski, 2014).

The contemporary superintendent serves as the chief executive officer of the school district and works in collaboration with the governing board (board of education) or local constituents who elected them in developing a shared vision with specific goals for the school system. The superintendent is tasked with building a supportive environment both internally and externally that enables the achievement of the district's goals and vision. The superintendent is also responsible for creating administrative practices that allow for the evaluation of personnel and education programs and the recruitment of high-quality educators. Finally, the superintendent must be capable of managing district finances efficiently and effectively. In short, the superintendent is responsible for creating a cohesive team of employees with strong qualifications to successfully educate children for their future and our nation's advancement (Alsbury, 2008).

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSO) published the first standards for educational leaders in 1996, followed by an update in 2008. The CSSO standards were modified in a new version of standards, *Professional Standards for Educational Leaders*, published in 2015 by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) (2015). These standards may be found in Appendix A of this document and are the outcome of a comprehensive process that took an exhaustive look at the new global economy, the technology-rich digital environment and workplace, the changing family structures and demographics, the political landscape and shifts of control, the funding cuts and competitive marketplace pressures, and increased student achievement accountability. The standards provide a framework for understanding the scope,

superfluity, and multiplicity of the superintendent's job as well as defining the knowledge, skills, and abilities required for successful operation. Because the standard areas are intertwined with superintendents' ongoing work, it is often difficult to differentiate among them.

The academic preparation of the superintendent has changed since Columbia University began to offer classes in educational administration. Today's superintendent obtains most of his/her formal academic training from university school administration degree programs. In 2010, almost 85% of all superintendents completed an accredited university preparation program for superintendent licensure. Also, well over 94% of sitting superintendents in 2010 held a valid superintendent license or endorsement. In a few states, superintendents can acquire a superintendent's license without having completed a separate and defined superintendent preparation program. Though no state requires a doctorate for initial state licensing of superintendents, the percentage of practitioners in the position possessing this level of education increased substantially from 1971 to 2010. In 2007, over 45% of superintendents reported having a doctoral degree (Kowalski, 2011).

Superintendents have access to and participate in continuing education. These experiences are offered by higher education institutions, corporate providers, state departments of education, and professional organizations. The importance of continuing to learn and stay current is now widely recognized by superintendents. Most states require superintendents to participate in continuing education as a requirement linked to

licensure renewal. Most educational leadership programs designed by higher education focus on licensure (Kowalski, 2011).

Kowalski's 2010 survey data of superintendents nationwide showed a majority of superintendents (83.3%) rated their academic and continuing education experiences as useful or very useful with 81.1% rating the credibility of their former professors as good or excellent. Superintendents felt good about their professional development and academic preparation and rated four academic courses as the most important: school law, school finance, school community relations, and human resource management (Kowalski, 2011). These four highest rated courses correlate with the wide range of superintendent duties (Kowalski, 2013):

- Providing leadership at the district level (p. 189),
- Community Leadership (p. 221),
- Material Resource Management (p. 247),
- Managing Human Resources (p. 279),
- Managing Student Services (p. 293), and
- Protecting the District with Legal Resources (p. 298).

As noted by the types of duties outlined above, school district leadership represents a complex form of social problem-solving. Superintendents are presented with ill-defined problems that lack a single solution path of right or wrong answers. The problems are multifaceted and require a leader who can identify the core problem. Not only is it difficult for leaders to state clearly what the problem is, but it also may not be clear exactly what information should be brought to bear on the problem. There is a

plethora of available information in most school districts as well as in all complex organizational systems, only some of which is relevant to the problem. Furthermore, it may be difficult to obtain accurate, timely information and identify key diagnostic information. As a result, superintendents must actively seek and carefully evaluate information while using creative problem solving to make decisions that are in the best interest of its many stakeholders within the complex organization of schooling.

Complex Organizations

Complex organizations are goal-directed, boundary-maintaining, socially-constructed systems of human activity (Scott, 2003). Additional criteria, such as deliberateness of design, the existence of status structures, patterned understandings between participants, orientation to an environment, possession of a methodology or pedagogy for delivery of a product or services, and a way to define the appropriate personnel and via qualifications are all viewed as important criteria (Scott, 2003). A complex organization has systems that are different from other organizations, such as small businesses, clubs, or family groups. Complex concerted collective action toward an apparent common purpose also distinguishes groups from social units such as friendship circles, audiences, and mass publics. Employees or individuals create or use complex systems when a task or objective exceeds their abilities and resources (Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

The school district or school has been constructed to assist society with the education of children and citizens. Most individuals would find it difficult to educate themselves or their children coherently and competently. Although homeschooling has

become popular among a minority of our society, most parents and individuals turn to school districts for education services. School districts also meet the requirement for a culture as explained by Meyer and Rowan (1977). In my experience, most school districts have a culture that is distinct and different from society as a whole. The culture of a school district or complex organization can be an enabler or inhibitor of high performance. Most complex organizations, including school districts, attempt to embed their unique systems thinking. The rationale for embedding systems thinking in the culture is a way to operate in an efficient and efficacious manner (Tate, 2009).

Systems Thinking

Systems thinking is "a management discipline that concerns an understanding of a system by examining the linkages and interactions between the components that comprise the entirety of that defined system" (Tate, 2009, p. 24). School districts adopting a systems thinking approach view the entire school district as a complex system. The systems thinking approach provides a means of understanding, analyzing, and talking about the design and construction of the organization as an integrated conglomerate of many dependent systems (human and non-human) that need to function in a unified way for the school district or organization to operate successfully and smoothly (Tate, 2009).

For a school district or any organization to function efficiently, the leaders must understand and envisage how the organization or school district as a whole is designed to work. They must also have a clear view of how the district or organization operates in reality and how it may fail under pressure. Superintendents and school leaders can use systems thinking to systematically understand the school district in a holistic way. It has

the ability to support school district or organization success. Peter Senge described systems thinking best in the quote below:

> More often than not, as a systems effort makes underlying structures clearer, members of the group may have moments of despair. Jan Forrester has called systems dynamics the 'new dismal science,' because it points out the vulnerabilities, limited understandings, and fallibilities of the past, and the assurance that today's thinking will be the source of tomorrow's problems. But actually, things are finally getting better. People see formerly 'undiscussable' problems rising to the surface. They realize how their old, beloved ways of thinking have produced their current problems. Their new awareness reinforces their sense of hope about leading an effective change. (Senge et al., 1999, pp. 93–94)

Many stakeholders espouse large changes or reform efforts in the public education system. This strong desire creates a tension for the superintendent to act and react. Senge (2012) offers the use of *leverage* as a means for superintendents to use to resolve difficult problems. He describes leverage in the following phrase, "Small, relatively inexpensive, well-focused actions can sometimes produce significant, enduring improvements if they are in the right place" (Senge, 2012, p. 248). A systems thinking approach often employs new types of thinking such as Senge's *leverage* thinking that can have a significant impact over time, while addressing key audiences.

The school district as an organization can suffer systemic failure. System-wide failure occurs when the different elements of the system that need to work together for overall success fail to do so. How the school district as an organization can fail may elude and defeat many superintendents. The superintendent may even seek to divert attention and reassure stakeholders and boards by indicating failure was caused by an individual or group. When this happens, a systemic failure has occurred (Tate, 2009).

One of the biggest leadership challenges for a superintendent is understanding that for every legitimate system put in place by the administration or the governing board within the organization, there is a shadow system. Shadow systems are where all the non-rational issues reside; e.g., politics, trust, hopes, ambitions, greed, favors, power struggles, etc. The superintendent must have well-honed leadership skills to ensure that the shadow systems do not overshadow or corrupt the legitimate systems put in place by the administration and governing boards (Tate, 2009).

Complexity Leadership Theory

Leadership theorists of the last 100 years have been successful at producing models that have been based on a top-down, bureaucratic archetype. The leadership models developed during the industrial revolution were useful for an economy and organizations premised on physical production. Even today, many school districts deliver education based on industrial age leadership models. These delivery and leadership models are not well-suited for a more knowledge-oriented economy and are clearly misaligned with education and complex educational organizations.

Complexity science suggests a different method of leadership. New modern models frame leadership as a complex interactive dynamic from which outcomes (e.g., learning, innovation, and adaptability) materialize (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Complexity Leadership Theory is a leadership model that facilitates "the learning, creative, and adaptive capacity of complex adaptive systems in knowledge-producing organizations or organizational units" (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007, p. 300). Complexity leadership theory seeks to advance complex adaptive organizational systems dynamics. At the same time,

Complexity Leadership Theory enables control structures for coordinating formal organizations. This coordination results in outcomes appropriate to the vision and mission of the organization. Complexity Leadership Theory integrates complexity, dynamics, and bureaucracy. These results enable the coordination, discovery, and implementation of complex adaptive systems with both an informal and formal hierarchy. The resulting hierarchy allows informed top-down control that is adaptive to changing stakeholder and organizational forces (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007).

School districts are complex organizations. Management of school districts has become more difficult over time as our economy and political infrastructure have become more complex and divisive. School districts as complex organizations require modern management methods to be successful in the mission of preparing students to participate in our economy, society, and democracy. Peter Drucker clearly articulates this notion:

> As we advance deeper in the knowledge economy, the basic assumptions underlying much of what is taught and practiced in the name of management are hopelessly out of date . . . Most of our assumptions about business, technology, and organization are at least 50 years old. They have outlived their time. (Drucker, 1999, p. 162)

Manville and Ober (2003) agree: “We’re in a knowledge economy, but our managerial and governance systems are stuck in the Industrial Era. It’s time for a whole new model” (p. 48).

One such modern model for consideration by school districts to adopt and utilize is under the auspices of Complexity Leadership Theory. When the leadership of complex organizations is viewed through the lens of System Thinking and Complexity Theory

Leadership, it becomes apparent that leaders of complex organizations need strong professional development that is grounded in this type of theory.

Professional Development in the Context of Leadership

The synonyms for "leader" are the boss, chief, commander, pacesetter, dominator, head, headman, hierarchy, honcho, master . . . superintendent. We have a basic idea of leader as the person in charge in a process where an individual influence a group of different people to achieve a common goal (Northouse, 2007). Leadership has also been said to be the art of inspiring others to pursue a vision within the parameters set to the extent that it becomes a shared effort, a shared vision, and a shared success (Zeitchik, 2012). Finally, leadership has been defined as a process of social influence that maximizes the efforts of others towards the achievement of a goal (Kruse, 2013).

There is a multitude of definitions of leadership, but what lies behind the approaches to leadership and makes a leader good? According to Jago, leaders carry out this process—called Process Leadership—by applying their leadership knowledge and skills. However, we know that traits can influence our actions. This is called Trait Leadership in that it was once common to believe that leaders were born rather than made (Jago, 1982). According to Kouzes and Posner (1987), the road to great leadership that is common to successful leaders includes being able to challenge the process, inspiring a shared vision by allowing others to model and act, while encouraging the heart. To accomplish this, Jago (2012) contends that good leaders develop through a never-ending process of self-study, education, training, and experience.

For this study, I used the title professional development as the broad term that encases the self-study, education, training, and experience of which Jago speaks. Numerous types and categories could fit under the title of professional development. For this study, I focused on the following four key components—Leader Development, Leadership Development, Management Development, and Professional Expertise Development.

Leader Development is mostly personal development. It is the process of becoming more in tune with one's self—to know thyself. Understanding personality characteristics of the leader, going back to the work of Donald Super (1957), is the essential part of being a leader and his/her career development. Donald Super described the work career as the implementation of one's understanding of the self. Understanding oneself is knowing and being able to clearly evaluate one's identity as perceived in relation to how others see him/her in the environment (Day, Zaccaro, & Halpin, 2004). Therefore, leader development can be seen as the action of increasing the competency of the leader's role requirements and personal identity (Hall, 2002; Super 1992).

Leadership development is defined as expanding the capacity of an organization's members to engage effectively in leadership roles and management processes (McCauley, Moxley, & Van Velsor, 1998). Leadership development involves building the capacity of individuals and groups to use learning to navigate their way out of problems. Typically, these are problems that could not have been predicted (Dixon, 1993). Problems can also arise from the disintegration of traditional organizational structures and the associated loss of sensemaking (Weick, 1993). A leadership

development approach is tilted toward building capacity to address unforeseen challenges (i.e., development). Leadership development according to Weick consists of using social systems to establish commitments among members of a community of practice (Wenger, 1998). Wenger espoused that both individual and relational lenses are significant concerns.

Management Development primarily includes managerial education professional development with an emphasis on acquiring explicit types of knowledge, skills, and abilities (Latham & Seijts, 1998; Mailick, Stumpf, Grant, Kfir, & Watson, 1998). These acquired skills are known to enhance task performance in management roles. The deployment of proven solutions to known problems, which gives it mainly a training orientation, is another characteristic feature of management development (Baldwin & Padgett, 1994; Keys & Wolfe, 1988; Wexley & Baldwin, 1986).

Professional expertise development refers to training in a particular area, topic or subject that is expected and practical within the context of work (Dewey, 1938). Professionals learn through "study, apprenticeship, and experience, both by expanding their comprehension of formal disciplines and by finding fresh ways to use them to achieve specific ends, constantly moving forward and backward from theory to practice so that each enriches the others" (Houle, 1980, p. 1). Practitioners create expert knowledge for use in practice through a process in which the practitioner "consciously reflects on the challenges of practice, reiteratively engages in problem posing, data gathering, action, evaluation, and reflection, and then shares the knowledge produced with others in practice" (Mott, 1996, p. 61). Learning and development in practice

therefore appraises the role of continuing professional education as a means of developing professional expertise (Elvira, Imants, Dankbaar, & Segers, 2017).

Additional to the four key components—Leader Development, Leadership Development, Management Development, and Professional Expertise Development—I believe it is equally important to recognize and address the leadership gaps as identified in the white paper from the Center for Creative Leadership:

- Outdated leadership styles continue through current selection, development, and reward practices,
- Leaders are resistant to change their leadership style,
- Leadership development is an underinvested component in organizations,
- Current business challenges require a different style of leadership,
- A democratic leadership style is needed for innovation, and
- Employees are not interested in developing leadership skills. (Leslie, 2015, p. 14)

Professional development in the context of leadership is important to understand when considering the types of training, education, and knowledge necessary for the superintendent to successfully lead a complex organization. It is also important to clearly understand the leadership gaps that have been identified through research as stated above. I fully utilized this knowledge in the development of my interview questions. Next, I examined how adults learn to better understand the process(es) needed to ensure quality in training (leadership development and/or professional development) for superintendents and to best situate my interview questions, reflective journaling, and formation of findings and conclusions.

Adult Learning Theory

Adult learning is the nucleus of how adult educators' practice. Assisting adults in the acquisition of knowledge requires knowing who adult learners are and how they learn. Broadly defined, adult education is "activities intentionally designed for the purpose of bringing about learning among those whose age, social roles, or self-perception, define them as adults" (Merriam & Brockett, 2007, p. 8). There are many reasons why adults participate in learning opportunities. Adults may participate to improve their life circumstance, job situation, health, family issue, or civic interest. Some adults enjoy learning and desire to expand their knowledge for fun or as a recreational activity. For either scenario, there is a direct link to their stage of life and lived experiences as an adult (Merriam & Bierema, 2014).

The setting for adult learning is typically designated into one of three categories: formal, nonformal, and informal (Coombs, Prosser, & Ahmed, 1973). This especially holds true today within the globalization of living in the 21st century. Adults are constantly learning and adapting whether or not this learning is formally realized. Learning by definition is "a change in human disposition or capacity that persists over a period of time and is not simply ascribable to processes of growth" (Gagné, 1985, p. 2). Learning is both a process and an outcome. Furthermore, learning can be gaining intellect of or about something, learning a physical skill, or learning a new emotion and mindset (Merriam & Bierema, 2014).

Learning theories then are explanations of what takes place when learning occurs. They are conceptual frameworks describing how knowledge is consumed, processed, and

remembered during learning (Simandan, 2013). Little consensus exists as to what are thought to be theories or how many theories even exist. Moreover, different researchers sort and classify the acquisition of knowledge using inconsistent criteria. Given this lack of agreement, I have included Merriam's five traditional learning theory orientations that are deep-seated and foundational in understanding adult learning. "The five orientations are behaviorist, humanist, cognitivist, social cognitivist, and constructivist" (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007, p. 26).

The behaviorist theory focuses on how the environment helps to shape the learning processes of an individual. Skinner (1971) says that the "ultimate goal of education is to bring about behavior that will ensure the survival of the human species, societies, and individuals" (p. 280). In short, the behaviorist theory treats the individual as a subject that is completely dependent on its environmental surroundings.

The humanist theory of learning purports that an individual has the potential to accumulate knowledge and learn and further has the desire to do so. This theory emphasizes that people aim to be the best that they can be and obtaining knowledge is a part of this quest. Rogers (1983) and Maslow (1970) believe that in general people inherently strive for good. They also indicated that an individual's behavior is a choice and not a result of their environment.

The cognitivist focuses on the learner finding meaning in learning and applying the learned information through the lens of previous experiences. Grippin and Peters (1984) eloquently state,

> The human mind is not merely a passive exchange-terminal system where the stimuli arrive and the appropriate response leaves [behavior theory]. Rather, the thinking person interprets sensations and gives meaning to the events that impinge upon his consciousness. (p. 285)

Ausuble (1967) suggests that learning must have some personal meaning as opposed to learning that is conceptual and abstract.

A variant to cognitive theory is a social cognitive theory, which is defined "by observing others, people acquire knowledge, rules, skills, strategies, beliefs, and attitudes" (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 288). Gibson (2004) embodies this theory best:

> Before something can be learned, the model must be attended to; some models are more and more likely than others to be attended to, such as those thought to be competent, powerful, attractive, and so on. Information from an observation the needs to be retained or stored for future use. Retention can be through symbols or words: imaginary stored symbols are pictures or mental images of past experiences, whereas verbal symbols capture the complexities of behavior in words. (p. 197)

The final orientation is a constructivist theory. Merriam et al. (2007) summarize this theory by characterizing it as "both an individual mental activity and a socially interactive interchange" (p. 297). Constructivists see knowledge as "constructed by learners as they attempt to make sense of their experiences. Learners, therefore, are not empty vessels waiting to be filled, but rather active organisms seeking meaning" (Driscoll, 2005, p. 387). This theory in my opinion is a culmination of all the previously-addressed theories with a laser focus on the individual learner making meaning of the learning environment.

The five theories combined bridge a dynamic, diverse process on the continuum of knowledge acquisition. Adult learning is a lifelong journey and is an essential skill to fully participate in our increasingly complex, global, technological, diverse world. Superintendents who are called upon to lead complex learning organizations must be afforded professional development opportunities that best meet the need of the adult learner at all career stages and in all demographic regions. Given the high turnover of superintendents in our nation and specifically in the state of North Carolina, it is essential to consider the educator, learner, process, and context, as well as the broader culture and diversity of learners when creating and facilitating professional learning opportunities for the adult learner.

Superintendent Turnover

Superintendents leaving their job at the end or during an academic school year is commonly referred to as turnover. Superintendent turnover can occur at the end of a specified contract term, at a mutually agreed upon time during the contract period, or upon the decision of the superintendent or governing board. The retention of the superintendent is a priority for many school districts seeking organizational stability, improvements in student learning, and administrative efficiency (Alsbury, 2008).

Boards work to retain the superintendent, when possible, to allow continuity of focus on district vision and goals. Retention of superintendents avoids potential disruption in district administration, staff morale, and community support. This disruption can affect the academic program thus hurting student achievement. The financial implications of superintendent turnover include search and recruiting costs that

divert funds and other resources away from core district functions. A superintendent's exit often derails ongoing district reform efforts that need multiple years of sustained nurturing to take root (Grissom & Andersen, 2012).

Despite the disruption that superintendent turnover may cause, only 51% of the superintendents that responded to the national 2010 decennial study of superintendents' survey indicated they planned to still be a superintendent in 2015 (Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, & Ellerson, 2010). According to a recent study on salary, performance, and superintendent turnover, district academic performance predicts superintendent turnover but not linearly (Hajime & Jason, 2016):

> Districts with very high and very low-test score performance are less likely than districts in the middle of the performance distribution to lose their superintendent, which may signal competing forces— for example, greater job attachment associated with high performance, fewer opportunities to move when performance is low. (p. 382)

Additionally, one of the main factors in turnover for both urban and rural superintendents is compensation. Compensation for superintendents comes in the form of base salary, bonus for performance, and fringe benefits. Unlike most public employees, superintendents negotiate salary with the local board of education. This is ironic, given that compensation is the primary reason superintendents leave their current positions (Young, Kowalski, McCord, & Petersen, 2013). Other factors such as the working relationship with the local board of education, co-workers, and teachers also impact a superintendent's decision to leave. Interestingly, there was no difference between male and female superintendent turnover and little difference between turnover

of urban and rural superintendents (Young et al., 2013). These survey data indicate a high turnover of superintendents nationally as we progress into the new millennium. This is most certainly evident currently in North Carolina.

North Carolina Superintendent Turnover

North Carolina superintendents mirror the everyday challenges of superintendents nationally. Workload, board relations, financial constraints, and ever-growing regulations permeate North Carolina just as they do other parts of the United States. One of the latest examinations of North Carolina superintendent turnover was completed by Wheeler (2013) at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Wheeler used a mixed methods approach to investigate the turnover of North Carolina superintendents. His study utilized an online survey sent to all 115 North Carolina superintendents and interviews of 8 retired superintendents. The response rate of the surveys was 68%. The Wheeler study found the top two drivers of superintendent turnover in North Carolina to be (a) the relationship with and pressure(s) from the local school board, and (b) fiscal responsibility. Employees not meeting expectations, legal actions, and significant loss of a personal life were additional drivers in the study of superintendent turnover. The study concluded that a strong collaborative respectful working relationship between the superintendent and the school board as an essential component in superintendent longevity. Furthermore, excellent communication skills and the ability to effectively communicate one's vision, ideas, plans, and educational beliefs were essential for a superintendent's success with his/her board of education (Wheeler, 2013).

Fiscal challenges and responsibility along with competence in data analysis were also found to be statistically significant in superintendent turnover. Managing the expectations of political figures involved in public school funding was espoused by superintendents participating in the study to be difficult. Furthermore, identifying and securing appropriate and adequate funding for the school district's operational and capital programs was found as a steep hurdle for today's superintendents. Superintendents that serve in school districts with substandard revenue and spending found fiscal constraints to be especially challenging (Wheeler, 2013). Wheeler's conclusion mirrors the study completed of Indiana superintendents, where conflict with the board was most often the reason superintendents left (Rausch, 2001). These data also align with the reason for involuntary non-extensions of Missouri public school superintendents (Allen, 1998).

The challenges of North Carolina superintendents are significant as evidenced in the turnover rates as reported by Mr. Jack Hoke, Executive Director of North Carolina School Superintendents' Association (NCSSA) 2017 and displayed in Table 1. According to Hoke 80% of turnover is due to retirement and 20% is due to other reasons. As a result, the majority of North Carolina Superintendents currently have less than five years of experience as indicated in Table 2. A real need therefore exists in providing high-quality leadership/professional development to reduce derailment, help assure success, and lessen turnover.

Table 1

North Carolina Superintendent Turnover Rates

Year	*n*	%
2011-2012	19	16.52
2012-2013	15	13.04
2013-2014	20	17.39
2014-2015	18	15.65
2014-2016	17	14.78
2016-2017	24	20.86
2017-2018	21	18.26

Note. Source: Hoke, "Superintendent Turnover Data" (2017)

Table 2

School Year 2017–2018 North Carolina Superintendent Longevity

Years of Experience	*n*
0 to 5	76
6 to 10	28
11 to 15	5
16 to 20	4
21 and greater	2

Note. Source: Hoke, "Superintendent Turnover Data" (2017)

North Carolina Professional Development Opportunities

The majority of Professional Development and Leadership Development for North Carolina Superintendents is provided by the North Carolina School Superintendents' Association (NCSSA). Additional to NCSSA, NCDPI provides quarterly updates and training on regulatory and legislative changes. NCSSA for the 2017/2018 school year delivered the following activities: NCASA Conference on

Educational Leadership, NCASA School Law Symposium, Summer Leadership Retreat, and Winter Leadership Conference. All of the activities fell in the realm of Management Development and Professional Expertise Development as evidenced by previous agendas and my attendance throughout the years as a business partner or sponsorship guest.

NCSSA in partnership with N.C. Alliance for School Leadership Development (NCASLD) also offers an Aspiring Superintendents Program, Digital Leadership Institute for NC Superintendents, and the Next Generation Superintendents' Development Program (North Carolina School Superintendent Association, n.d.). The Aspiring Superintendents Program (a talent pipeline) is designed to foster improvement in the public schools of North Carolina through training and leadership development experiences [Leader & Leadership Development]. This is accomplished through a 6-day personal leadership effectiveness program. A key feature of the program is the executive coaching provided for individuals who want to become a superintendent. The program is designed to solidify the leadership skills of participants (North Carolina School Superintendent Association, n.d.).

NCSSA has partnered with NCASLD and national and state leaders to deliver the Digital Leadership Institute for NC Superintendents. This institute provides an opportunity for superintendents to learn ways to implement and transform their district to address the digital imperatives that have been identified [Management Development and Professional Expertise Development]. The presenters share information for moving districts toward a digital future using best practices and national models. The focus is on developing district leadership in communication and the use of innovative tools. The

tools are designed to transform pedagogy via learning environments, professional development, and professional learning communities. "The Digital Leadership Institute extends guidance beyond the individual superintendent, offering key action steps for building a skilled digital leadership team as well as references and resources for continuous professional development" (North Carolina School Superintendent Association, n.d.).

NCSSA also provides the Next Generation Superintendent Development Program (NGSDP). This program [Leader Development] has been established for four years and in 2017 will start Cohort V. The NGSDP program is designed to support superintendents as they strive to grow as district leaders and advance their personal leadership abilities (North Carolina School Superintendent Association, n.d.).

As outlined above, a variety of professional development activities are available to North Carolina Superintendents and include all four categories (Leader Development, Leadership Development, Management Development, and Professional Expertise Development) utilized by this study and outlined in the previous section entitled *Professional Development in the Context of Leadership*. Management Development and Professional Expertise Development is heavily referenced above for all superintendents with Leader Development and Leadership Development available for targeted audiences utilizing a cohort approach for a small number of participants, leaving the majority of superintendents without development in these areas, unless sought outside North Carolina.

Rural superintendents in North Carolina are often geographically challenged to attend the professional development offered by NCDPI and NCSSA. Professional development for superintendents is often physically located in the major metropolitan areas of North Carolina such as the Triangle (Raleigh), Triad (Greensboro) and Charlotte regions of the state. For example, the NCSSA Winter Leadership Conference is housed in Greensboro (North Carolina School Superintendent Association, n.d.). NCDPI events are typically scheduled in the Triangle, Triad, and Charlotte. In previous informal conversations with rural superintendents, they indicated that travel time, costs of lodging, and being away from the local district creates barriers to attendance. While the scheduled activities make a strong effort at providing a variety of professional development offerings, they do not offer differentiation based on district size, geographic region, etc. My study focused on the perceived professional development needs of the rural superintendent, but first, a good understanding of rural education and the superintendency must be explored.

The Rural Superintendency

Rural schools and the communities they serve are diverse in nature with distinct personalities, cultures, and beliefs making it difficult to create and gain agreement on a universal set of characteristics that comprehensively define them (Herzog & Pittman, 2003; Lewis, 2003; Sherwood, 2000). Each rural community is unique. Nevertheless, many rural communities find themselves sharing the same strengths and facing identical challenges:

1. low population density and isolation (Beeson & Strange, 2003; Stern, 1994),
2. school and community interdependence (Collins, Flaxman, & Schartman, 2001; Herzog & Pittman, 2003; Kannapel & DeYoung, 1999; Lane & Dorfman, 1997; Seal & Harmon, 1995; Stern, 1994),
3. oppression as lived experience (Hammer, 2001; Haas & Nachtigal, 1998; Herzog & Pittman, 2003; Nadel & Sagawa, 2002),
4. a history of conflict regarding purposes of schooling (Harmon & Branham, 1999; Howley, Harmon, & Leopald, 1996; Kannapel & DeYoung, 1999; Sherwood, 2000; Smith, 2003),
5. an "out-migration" of young talent (Hammer, 2001; Howley et al., 1996; Nadel & Sagawa, 2002; Smith, 2003), and
6. a salient attachment to place (Bauch, 2001; Haas & Nachtigal, 1998; Howley et al., 1996; Kemmis, 1990; Porter, 2001).

According to the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2016), there are over 13,500 school districts in the United States of America serving roughly 98,000 public schools, employing over 3.7 million teachers, and serving more than 50 million public school students. Almost one-third of all U.S. schools reside in rural America (J. Johnson, Showalter, Klein, & Lester, 2014). In North Carolina, 74 of the 115 school districts are classified as rural (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Of the classified rural districts in North Carolina, 36 are designated as rural fringe, 31 are designated at rural distant, and seven are designated as rural remote by the Office of Budget and Management (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). A

complete listing may be found in Appendix B of this document. The National Center for Education Statistics catalogs rural school districts using the definitions in Table 3. A detailed definition may be found in Appendix C of this document.

Table 3

Standards for Delineating Metropolitan and Micropolitan Statistical Areas

	Rural
Fringe	Census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster
Distant	Census-defined rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an urban cluster
Remote	Census-defined rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an urbanized area and is also more than 10 miles from an urban cluster

Note. Source: 2010 Standards for Delineating Metropolitan and Micropolitan Statistical Areas (2010).

Rural superintendents leading these rural fringe, rural distant, and rural remote districts face unique challenges. Rural education, school districts, and their communities are under increasing pressure financially and culturally. Rural school districts' sense as the community's meeting place has now been relegated to commercial venues such as Walmart, Lowes, and fast food establishments. The onslaught of the internet, federal laws, regulations, and standardized tests have deeply changed rural districts making rural education as was once known unrecognizable (Reynolds, 2017).

Statistical evidence and trend data cannot answer all the questions about what is taking place in districts. While all of these are areas defined as rural and are as different

as night and day, they all have the common thread of diverse economic, political, cultural, and social realities. But what makes rural North Carolina superintendents my focus is their challenge to lead with many times difficult odds: "generational poverty, inadequate financing, teacher shortages, and inaccessible or unaffordable services for children and families" (D. T. Williams, 2010, p. 1).

Variations across rural America and specifically rural North Carolina can be stunning. Some superintendents have a view of the deserted coastal areas with a fringe of wealth sprinkled along the outer banks. Many view the vast open space of land that once served in the family tobacco farming industry. Now the land is used for farming, but the labor has moved to mechanization resulting in poverty for former farm hands. Other superintendents have districts that were once wealthy and full of good-paying textile jobs. Now superintendents look out at the abandoned textile mills and the rusty hulks of an industrial past that once funding good schools and community services. The mountain superintendents see isolated mountainous towns that used logging as the source of income now struggle to adapt to an economy based on tourism (Tickamyer, Warlick, & Sherman, 2017).

Superintendents and educators of today work with many students hoping to escape rural America, forgoing their affinity to place, for the metropolitan areas of the country in search of jobs, wealth, and a better way of life (Bauch, 2001; Haas & Nachtigal, 1998; Howley et al., 1996; Kemmis, 1990; Porter, 2001). While many students have a strong desire to stay in rural America and have done so, they are diminishing in numbers. Students of today believe that a better life exists outside the

rural confines of living. Parents worry that schools are preparing students to leave the community, which hinders support for rural schools and those that lead them (Reynolds, 2017).

Rural superintendents educate one in every five children in this country and are often forgotten in the everyday conversations of policymakers, political leaders. The public promotion of their school districts and the students they serve is paramount for them not to become invisible to society. Rural superintendents are constantly challenged to keep their students visible and viable in our society and economy. Quoting Greer, "In the information age invisibility is tantamount to death" (Greer, 2005, p. 13). To deal with the unique challenges faced by rural superintendents in America and specifically to North Carolina an ongoing high-quality professional development that is easily accessed and made affordable is paramount. I grew up in and still reside in rural North Carolina, which makes this study personal as well as an educational fact-finding mission with hopes of creating a professional development tiered framework based on the perceptions of needs that could be beneficial for superintendents.

I was intrigued by superintendents' mindsets towards professional development and their perceived needs in leading this complex organization. I believe that if one wants to know what professional development superintendents need, then discourse and interaction with superintendents are critical (Lichtman, 2013). Specifically, I was interested in North Carolina rural superintendents perceived professional development needs as leaders of a complex organization.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

> Methodology should not be a fixed track to a fixed destination but a conversation about everything that could be made of happen (J. C. Jones, Designs Methods, 1970–1992)

Introduction

In designing this study, I was drawn to a methodology that focused largely on the perceptions and experiences of participants, hence giving them voice. It was primarily for this reason, I adopted qualitative methodology. I used interviews for data collection in my study in order to best understand the professional and leadership development needs of my participants. I also wanted to understand what collective professional development needs exist in order to effectively lead rural school districts that are by definition complex organizations. Twelve rural North Carolina Superintendents from across all regions of the state participated in my study.

Research Design

Qualitative research is a method of inquiry that utilizes various methods of data collection in an effort to understand human behavior in natural settings (Lichtman, 2013). Its intent is to interpret the meanings of others as they relate to the world and a particular topic (Creswell, 2002). For this reason, I chose to use a qualitative approach for this study. Lichtman (2010) describes the qualitative approach as "a way of knowing that assumes that the researcher gathers, organizes, and interprets information with his or her

eyes and ears as a filter" (p. 7). According to Lichtman (2013), the main purpose of qualitative research is "to provide an in-depth description and understanding of the human experience" (p. 17).

The purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions of rural North Carolina superintendents regarding their professional development needs. I documented the perceptions, personal accounts, feelings, and desires of 12 North Carolina rural superintendent participants through the use of interviews. I served as the intermediary striving to make meaning of the participant's words in hopes of having a clear outcome to help shape professional development offerings for rural superintendents in the future (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The interviews were conducted and analyzed for themes and patterns using thematic analysis. Additionally, I used narrative analysis to understand how participants drew meaning from their individual experiences. The use of thematic and narrative analysis helped answer my research questions in this study (Glesne, 2016). This study documented the what, why or how questions that are typical of qualitative research.

Design of This Basic Interpretive Qualitative Research Study

In this section, I will discuss the steps that were used for participant selection and recruitment, provide a profile of each superintendent participant, describe the methods used for collecting data, and summarize how these data were analyzed in order to address my four guiding questions for research, which are listed below:

- What do practicing rural North Carolina superintendents perceive their professional development needs to be in leading complex organizations?

- How do practicing rural North Carolina superintendents get their professional development needs met and how do they decide what to participate in for leadership growth?
- Are there unique professional development needs for rural novice superintendents (less than 5 years of experience) compared to more experienced rural superintendents (greater than 5 years of experience)?
- What types of professional development delivery best meet the needs of practicing rural superintendents and to what extent are their needs met?

Participant Selection and Recruitment

As noted by Lunenburg and Irby (2008), it is essential for researchers to determine the participants they wish to include in their study and to specify the criteria by which they are to be included. Moreover, they have pointed out that in the sphere of qualitative dissertation studies, *purposive sampling* is often used to make sure that fewer people are invited to participate in order to secure an adequate depth and complexity of information in attaining answers to the research questions. For my study, I focused on *criterion sampling* as a means for including a sufficient number of participants in my data collection design.

Criterion sampling involves selecting participants who meet predetermined criteria of importance (Patton & Patton, 2002). In using criterion sampling, I selected participants who met two main criteria:

- Currently serving school superintendents
- Superintendents serving in a rural or rural fringe setting

Since ruralness exists in North Carolina from the mountains to the coastal area, participant representation from all geographical regions of North Carolina was targeted in order to gain a more expansive perspective. A balance in both race and gender among participants was strongly considered in hopes of gaining broader perceptions.

I used the 2017-2018 North Carolina superintendent cohort listing that is publicly disseminated by NCDPI for selection of participants using the criteria outlined above. From the list of 115 school districts, I selected fourteen participants to recruit for participation in the study who met the inclusion criteria with hopes of having at least ten superintendents agree to participate.

I emailed the superintendents and asked for their participation. I also sent a letter of consent to participate for their signature should they agree to participate. All e-mail scripts were Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved. Of the 14 original emails that I sent, two superintendents had retired since the printing of the NCDPI master list, making them ineligible to participate in the study based on my criteria. The remaining 12 eligible superintendents responded to my email and agreed to participate in the study. For full disclosure, I did have to solicit the support of a professional colleague to garner participation support from several of the superintendents. Superintendents typically respond to people they know, trust, and have a professional/personal relationship. Because I am a researcher, former educator, and current business world affiliate, many of the superintendents needed assurances from a trusted colleague before agreeing to participate. I used a trusted colleague to help assure superintendents of my credibility and that the study was not being used as a marketing call for any corporate identity. All

12 superintendent participants signed the Informed Consent Form approved by the IRB to participate in the interviews.

Summary of Superintendent Participants

Eight male and four female rural superintendents, with two identifying as African American and ten as Caucasian, agreed to participate in the study. All 12 participants hold a North Carolina Superintendents license and the pinnacle of educational attainment with a Doctoral Degree. The median age of the participants was 52 years old with ages ranging from the mid-1940s to the mid-1960s. The distribution by regional representation was North Central (1), Northeast (2), Northwest (1), Piedmont-Triad (2), Sandhills (1), Southeast (1), Southwest (2), and Western (2). All 12 participants were current superintendents serving districts located in a rural setting.

Table 4 shows a visual representation of the superintendent participant demographic information. A pseudonym was given to each superintendent participant and the school district they serve in order to protect their anonymity. Furthermore, regional information and other identifying factors have purposely been omitted or an approximation has been given. Table 4 presents a narrative representation (more detail to be given in Chapter IV) briefly profiling each of the superintendent participants for background information.

Table 4

Summary of Superintendent Participants

	Pseudonym	School District	Gender	Race	Years as Superintendent	Approximate Years in Current Position
1	Dr. Ben Arrow	High Vista	Male	Caucasian	11	11
2	Dr. Mickey Bill	Goldsmith	Male	Caucasian	9	4
3	Dr. Mark Beta	Industrial Park	Male	Caucasian	4	4
4	Dr. Steve Brook	Midway Park	Male	Caucasian	6	5
5	Dr. Kay Alpha	Big Vista	Female	Caucasian	8	8
6	Dr. Lisa Wade	Great Hope	Female	Caucasian	5	1
7	Dr. Tico Johnson	Highland Creek	Male	Caucasian	7	7
8	Dr. Tim Tapps	White Beach	Male	Caucasian	10	5
9	Dr. Lorie Arnold	Desert Rose	Female	Caucasian	<1	<1
10	Dr. Rob Whitman	Williams Park	Male	African American	7	7
11	Dr. Bill Bear	Black Bear	Male	Caucasian	8	2
12	Dr. Jill Meadow	Short Creek	Female	African American	5	5

Superintendent Profiles

Dr. Ben Arrow is a White male who is approximately 65 years old and who has served as the Superintendent of High Vista School District for about 11 years. High Vista School District serves close to 24,000 students and is considered a suburban area on the rural fringe. While the federal classification of this school district is suburban, most of the student population is located in parts of the county that meet the federal definition of rural fringe. Dr. Arrow's journey to the superintendency was traditional in nature. He

was a teacher, principal, district administrator, associate superintendent and superintendent. He has a doctoral degree and a Superintendent's license.

Dr. Mickey Bill is a White male who is approximately 55 years of age. He has served as Superintendent of Goldsmith School District for about 4 years. Goldsmith School District serves close to 18,000 students and has the federal classification designation of being a rural fringe school district. Dr. Bill's journey to the superintendency was non-traditional in nature. He spent the early part of his career working in the juvenile justice system. He enjoyed working part-time in school athletics as a coach and substitute teacher. As a result, he went back to school to obtain licensure in counseling and special education. Dr. Bill has served as a teacher, special education administrator, assistant superintendent, and superintendent. He has worked in multiple school districts both in and outside of North Carolina. He has a doctoral degree and a Superintendent's license.

Dr. Mark Beta is a White male who is approximately 45 years of age. He has served as Superintendent of Industrial Park School District for roughly 4 years. Industrial Park School District serves nearly 15,000 students and has the federal classification designation of a rural town fringe school district. Dr. Beta's journey to the superintendency was also traditional in nature. He began his journey as a math teacher. His administrative career started as an assistant principal, principal, district office administrator, and assistant superintendent before becoming a superintendent. He has a doctoral degree and a Superintendent's license.

Dr. Steve Brook is a White male who is approximately 55 years old. He has served as Superintendent of Midway Park School District for nearly 5 years. Midway Park School District serves close to 17,000 students and has the federal classification designation of being a rural fringe district. Dr. Brook's journey to the superintendency was traditional in nature serving as a teacher, principal, central office administrator, and assistant superintendent before becoming a superintendent. He has served in a large suburban district as well as this rural fringe district. Dr. Brook has a doctoral degree and a Superintendent's license.

Dr. Kay Alpha is approximately 55 years of age, is a White female. She has served as Superintendent of Big Vista School District for roughly 8 years. Big Vista School District, federally classified of rural fringe, serves around 8,000 students. Her pathway to the superintendency was singularly focused through the educational ranks held within the school district. Dr. Alpha was a teacher, principal, curriculum director, and assistant superintendent before becoming the superintendent. Dr. Alpha has served as an educator in Big Visa School District her entire career. She has a doctoral degree and a Superintendents license.

Dr. Lisa Wade is a White female of approximately 53 years of age, has served as Superintendent of Great Hope School District for nearly one year. Great Hope School District serves roughly 11,300 students and has the federal classification designation of being a rural fringe school district. Dr. Wade's journey to the superintendency was traditional in nature serving as a teacher, assistant principal, principal, and district office executive in several school districts before becoming deputy superintendent and

superintendent. Dr. Wade has earned a doctoral degree and holds a Superintendent's license.

Dr. Tico Johnson is approximately 58 years of age and identifies as a White male. He has served as Superintendent of Highland Creek School District for roughly 7 years. Highland Creek School District serves close to 12,000 students and has the federal classification designation of rural fringe. Dr. Johnson's journey to the superintendency was non-traditional in nature, beginning a career in the furniture industry, transitioning to the Department of Corrections, before entering the public education arena as a lateral entry teacher. His educational career moved quickly to the principalship, serving an alternative school within the Department of Health and Human Services. Dr. Johnson later served as an assistant principal and high school principal in the traditional public schools setting before serving as an interim superintendent and superintendent. He holds both a doctoral degree and Superintendents license.

Dr. Tim Tapps is a White male of approximately 60 years of age. He has served as Superintendent of White Beach School District for roughly 5 years. White Beach School District serves nearly 8,000 students and has the federal classification designation of rural distant school district. Dr. Tapps's journey to the superintendency was somewhat traditional in nature, serving as a teacher, coach, assistant principal, and principal before becoming a superintendent. He did not work in the central office prior to becoming a superintendent. Dr. Tapps has worked in suburban districts as well as rural fringe districts. He holds both a doctoral degree and a Superintendents license.

Dr. Lorie Arnold is a White female who is approximately 51 years of age. She has served as Superintendent of Desert Rose School District for less than a calendar year. Desert Rose School District serves roughly 8,200 students and has the federal classification designation of being a rural fringe district. Dr. Arnold began her educational career traditionally as a classroom teacher, assistant principal, principal, central office administrator, and assistant superintendent before becoming a superintendent. Dr. Arnold has worked in both small rural fringe and large suburban districts. She holds both a doctoral degree and a Superintendents license.

Dr. Rob Whitman is an African American male of approximately 55 years of age, has served as Superintendent of Williams Park School District for nearly 7 years. Williams Park School District serves close to 4,500 students and has the federal classification designation of being a rural fringe school district. Dr. Whitman began his educational career traditionally as a teacher, assistant principal, principal, district level administrator, and assistant superintendent before becoming a superintendent. Dr. Whitman has worked in rural fringe, rural distant, and city midsized school districts. He holds a doctoral degree and Superintendents license.

Dr. Bill Bear is a White male of approximately 58 years of age, has served as the Superintendent of Black Bear School District for nearly 8 years. Black Bear School District serves roughly 1,600 students and has the federal classification designation of rural distant school district. Dr. Bear began his career in the railroad industry before starting his educational journey. He began as a part-time math and In-School Suspension (ISS) teacher with some janitorial duties before landing a full-time biology teaching

position. His administrative career began as an assistant principal moving to the superintendency of a small school district outside North Carolina. He served this small school district for roughly 2 years before coming back to North Carolina to serve in his current role as superintendent. He also holds a doctoral degree and a Superintendents license.

Dr. Jill Meadow is an African American female of approximately 62 years of age. She has served as Superintendent of Short Creek School District for nearly 5 years. Short Creek School District serves close to 1,700 students and has the federal classification designation of being a rural distant school district. Dr. Meadow's journey to the superintendency began as a bus driver, substitute teacher, teacher, assistant principal, principal, and district administrator before becoming a superintendent. Dr. Meadow pursued educational degrees throughout her journey achieving the terminal degree of doctorate. She also holds a Superintendents license.

Data Collection Method

Richards and Morse (2012) describe qualitative data as complex and consisting of descriptions and narratives that are context bound. It allows the researcher to paint a picture of the findings. Qualitative methodology is dialectic and interpretive. During the interaction between the researcher and the research participants, the participants' world is discovered and interpreted by means of the qualitative method (De Vos, 2002). Qualitative research refers to inductive, holistic, emic, subjective, and process-oriented methods used to understand, interpret, describe, and develop a theory of phenomena or setting. It is a systematic, subjective approach used to describe life experiences and give

them meaning (C. Williams, 2011). Qualitative research attempts to provide a study with a detailed understanding of the content being shared (Anyan, 2013). The methodology allows for the collection of data in a thoughtful and systematic way. Collecting data using the methodologies described by Richards, De Vos, and Williams allows for the analysis of the data to be meaningful. Data analysis is the organization of what you have seen, heard, and read during the data collection phase of research (Glesne, 2016).

As the researcher, I played a critical role in the qualitative research of this study. The research process included collecting data and constructing realities through interpretations (Lichtman, 2013). The steps of data collection for this study involved: "setting the boundaries for the study, collecting information through observations, interviews, documents, and/or visual materials, and establishing protocols for recording information" (Creswell, 2002, p. 148). Much of qualitative research depends on what people have to say, and the researcher is the primary source of data collection and making sense of what is said (Lichtman, 2013).

According to Lichtman (2013), interviews are the primary way qualitative researchers gather data. Lichtman (2013) defines qualitative interviewing as

> Techniques of data collection that ranges from semi-structured to unstructured formats. Interviewing is seen as a conversation in which an informant and a researcher interact so that the informant's thoughts are revealed and interpreted by a researcher. (p. 325)

The purpose of an interview, regardless of the format, is to find out what the interviewee thinks or feels about a particular topic or idea (Lichtman, 2013). For the purpose of this research study, I utilized a semi-structured protocol in order to conduct one-to-one

interviews with each participating superintendent. Individual interviews provided an understanding of how participants perceived their professional development needs as rural superintendents leading a complex organization. I created and used an interview protocol with a set of guiding questions for use with all participants. I have included the interview protocol in Appendix A.

The semi-structured approach allowed me to vary questions when necessary as the interviews progressed (Lichtman, 2013). The interviews were held at mutually agreed-upon times and places, were recorded with the use of an electronic device (my password-protected smartphone), and were then transcribed verbatim to aid in my data analysis. The interviews were conducted over a period of 2 months with each interview lasting between 60 and 90 minutes in length for a total of approximately 18 hours of interview time. Eleven interviews were held in the participating superintendent's office with one interview taking place off-site in a location mutually agreed upon by the participant and the researcher. Beyond using pseudonyms in this manuscript, I further maintained the confidentiality of each participant by making no mention to participants of what others had been sharing with me throughout this process.

Data Analysis

Qualitative researchers are responsible for organizing and making sense of the data. I recorded each interview and had the recording transcribed. I reviewed each transcription multiple times. The initial review of the transcription familiarized me with the data. I thought it was important for me to get a general sense of how superintendents think about professional development and how it relates to their personal growth and

development. After subsequent readings and member checking of the transcripts, I began the coding process. I purchased and used a software program, Atlas.ti, to help with multi-color highlighting to identify the codes as I read the transcripts and began to break down the data. While reading and analyzing the interview text, I employed axial coding. Merriam (2009) defines axial coding as the process of relating categories. Axial coding allowed for reflection and development of categories or groupings around the interpretation of the data. By employing an axial coding technique, the categories emerged from each dataset allowing for groups and subcategories to be created. The data were reviewed and aligned to address my four research questions.

To facilitate this process, I used Lichtman's (2010) three C's: coding, categorizing, and identifying concepts. During further readings, codes were applied, and the data were categorized. Based on the interview protocols, I created a list of a priori codes about, but not limited to, accessibility, applicability, importance, attitudes, practices, programs attended, and offerings as related to professional development of superintendents. Merriam (1998) explains, "Coding is nothing more than assigning some shorthand designation to various aspects of your data so that you can quickly retrieve specific pieces of the data" (p. 164). Utilizing coding techniques helped me to organize and make sense of the large amount of data I had collected. A priori coding was used for the initial data analysis that arose from my conceptual framework detailed in the next section. I began to look for big idea's participants shared about professional development needs as well as those concerning their experiences and participation in professional

development offerings. During this process, codes were created as I worked through each of the research questions.

Just as Lichtman (2013) suggested, I analyzed the raw data, developed codes and categories, and finally thematic concepts or themes. A theme is a central issue or idea which a researcher identifies based on coding (Lichtman, 2013). I reached out to three superintendent participants to ask clarifying questions that germinated during this phase of data analysis. I scheduled an individual face-to-face meeting at a mutually agreed time with each of the three superintendent participants. The meetings took place during a state level superintendent conference where most of my participants were present. I later sent via email each superintendent participant a document outlining my themes and findings that had emerged from my data analysis. All but two superintendent participants read and responded to me via email supporting my findings and themes. From the ten superintendent participants who responded, three provided specific comments for me to consider for my final recommendation section. These final themes and findings are shared throughout the remaining chapters of this study and were used to develop the professional development framework for rural superintendents who lead school districts that are by definition complex organizations.

Subjectivity and Positionality

Subjectivity is inevitable, and according to Peshkin (1988), it is defined as the quality of an investigator that affects all the results of an investigation or research study. Lichtman (2013) refers to this as reflexivity and defines it as the capacity of a researcher

to reflect on his or her values during and after the research. All researchers come to any study with bias and cannot be truly objective in every aspect of the research.

Life and workplace experiences color one's objectivity and introduce bias into any analysis. I was raised in a medium size town in eastern North Carolina. This shaped my current beliefs and values and are based in longstanding ideals of people, communities, and education. Beneath these ideals is the foundation of service to my community that was instilled in me by my parents. The value of giving back and working to ensure equitable resources and opportunities are afforded to all has emerged in me from early childhood lessons of community service. Through this graduate school experience, I have been working to understand my own prejudices and combat them with knowledge and active reflection to ensure that my actions are in line with my beliefs.

I was the Vice President for Customer Enablement in Pearson PLC, one of the largest providers of instructional materials, testing, educational software and professional services for the education industry. I have deep experience in education, having worked at a middle school, high school, district office, and NCDPI. I have also worked in private industry. While with IBM, Chancery Software, and Pearson, I have worked with education agencies across the nation and the world. I have a broad understanding of how education works from both the public and private sector perspectives. My background in the business world could skew me toward market-based approaches in education policy and process. With this understanding, I was deliberate in listening to my participants' voices so that I could hear and see the world as they perceive it. I purposefully bracketed my assumptions to ensure the meaning and interpretation of the participants' words were

accurate. I currently live in rural North Carolina, and I have that lens that I must consider as I review and analyze data.

Engaging in self-reflective activities allowed me to actively monitor my subjectivity. I know it is important for me to do as Creswell (1994) suggests by executing reflexivity through being aware of and sensitive to the ways my history and beliefs can shape my study. For this reason, I exercised reflexivity by keeping a journal throughout the research process. I also shared my journal with a professional peer to limit blind spots and bias of which I may not be fully aware.

I became interested in the professional development of superintendents during my Ed.S. internship when seeking a superintendent's license. I asked and was granted an opportunity to construct a support role in the 2015-2016 NC Superintendents' Executive Leadership Program as part of my internship hallmark project. The participants' attendance was sponsored by two small business and industry leaders who are committed to public education and who worked with the (NCSSA) for recruitment. The program was provided at no cost to 20 participants with only travel, lodging, and the time commitment required of the participants. Given the success of this program, a 2016-2017 program was created and supported by the same business leadership to support 12 superintendents who requested to participate in the second year of leadership development. I was not officially connected or affiliated with the sponsoring business organizations although Pearson engaged these organizations in the normal course of business.

It was through this experience that I was able to meet and speak with potential superintendent participants and begin to learn of their strong desire to grow and develop as leaders. It is also where I discovered that opportunities for superintendent development were minimally available, and the high cost of attendance for national programs inhibited participation.

Trustworthiness

I established trustworthiness through triangulation of sources, member checking, reflexive journaling, peer debriefing, and working as a responsible and ethical researcher. Triangulation of sources refers to eliciting data regarding a topic from multiple sources of the same type in order to determine if different sources provide different information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For example, if ethnographic interviewing is the type of data collection method, asking the same question about a topic from different participants would be a triangulation of sources. I plan to utilize this trustworthiness criterion whenever possible throughout the data collection process of my study.

Member Checking

Member checking is one means to establish trustworthiness. This technique is where "data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions are tested with members of those stakeholder groups from whom the data were originally collected" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314). I utilized member checking to ensure the accuracy of each transcription. Individual transcriptions were sent via email to each of the 12 superintendents with a reply request to provide editing revisions and/or feedback as needed to ensure clarity of thought and discussion. A purchased email tracking program,

Mailtrack, was used to track the receipt and opening of each email and attached transcription document. All 12 superintendent participants opened both the email and transcription document attachment.

I received a written email response from three of the 12 superintendent participants. Two superintendent participants suggested minor corrections for clarity and understanding. One superintendent participant mistakenly received a jumbled transcription document that needed serious transcription attention. I profusely apologized to the superintendent participant and quickly transcribed the entire interview by hand. I had used an electronic service and this particular interview had been poorly transcribed. Fortunately, this was one of my first transcriptions and the member checking process with the superintendent participant helped solidify my data.

I also reached out to three superintendent participants to ask clarifying questions that germinated during the data analysis phase of this study. I scheduled an individual face-to-face meeting at a mutually agreed time with each of the three superintendent participants. The meetings took place during a state level superintendent conference where most of my participants were present.

I did this additional member checking to ensure that the individual and collective voice of the participants was heard. Additionally, I wanted to see if the superintendent participants had recommendations that I had not considered due to my positional absence from the role as superintendent. Finally, I added this step as a means of service to the superintendent participants and as a way of paying them back for helping me through this dissertation journey.

Reflexive Journaling

The technique of reflexive journaling refers to keeping a journal in which the researcher carries out a conversation with herself or himself on topics related and not related to the research, as in a diary (Lincoln & Guba, 2016). The purpose of the journal was to keep a record of the changes occurring in me, the researcher. I used this reflexive journaling process as a way to make meaning about the research and also about thoughts that I had outside the research topic as I interacted with the participants. Furthermore, I used the reflexive journal to help me stay keenly away from any biases that presented itself.

Peer Debriefing

Peer debriefing exposes oneself to a professional peer to "keep the inquirer honest," assist in developing a working hypothesis, develop and test the emerging design, and obtain emotional catharsis (Guba, 1981). During this entire study, I systematically shared my journal and data with a professional peer who holds an impartial view of the study. This professional was qualified to assist me because of their deep understanding of the superintendency and the obtainment of a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership. I shared my work, thoughts, concerns, findings, and recommendations at each stage of the dissertation process. I asked the impartial peer to provide me with feedback to detect any problems in my research such as overemphasized points, underemphasized points, vague descriptions, errors in the data, and/or biases or assumptions made by me the researcher (Creswell, 1994). I found this exercise to be personally rewarding and enriching. Having a "safe" professional impartial peer to

bounce ideas off and to also hold me accountable for my thoughts, actions, beliefs, and biases helped me grow as a researcher, leader, and person.

Responsible and Ethical Researcher

Finally, as a responsible and ethical researcher, I communicated the purpose of the study to all potential participants and allowed the individual participants to determine if he/she wished to participate. I acted in a responsible manner when conducting all aspects of my research. I treated all data with utmost confidentiality. I did not begin any data collection or participant recruitment until approval was granted by both my proposal committee and the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Upon approval, I communicated via email the purpose of my study and my responsibility as a researcher to each of the participants as required. I also sent the IRB approved email script and semi-structured interview questions to each participant before the scheduled meeting time. Through this process, I maintained the confidentiality of each participant by creating a chart of pseudonyms to replace participants' actual names and district names for the purpose of including direct quotes and references to participants within my dissertation. I also did not discuss individual interview conversations with the other participants. All interview data collected was held to the highest confidentiality standard.

Afforded to students at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG), I used Box as my electronic storage repository. UNCG's Box electronic storage services are Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) compliant and are the most secure resource for student use at this time. The printed transcripts of the interviews have been placed in a locked filing cabinet drawer with an electronic copy stored in Box. The

interview recordings captured were stored on a secure password protected digital device and have since been destroyed with a copy stored in the same Box folder. All documents will be retained for the time specified by the IRB. The data will be available for audit purposes during that period. The documents and artifacts will be destroyed via IRB standards. The paper documents will be shredded using a cross-cut shredder and the Box folder will be deleted according to UNCG data destruction requirements as specified by the IRB timeline.

Benefits and Risks

This study has the potential to present a great benefit to the planning of professional development for superintendents by local, state and national organizations. It also has the potential to impact the participating superintendents. Participants could benefit by having the opportunity to share experiences related to their perceived professional development needs, the needs of future superintendents and superintendents at various career stages, and the methods and delivery for receiving such professional development. Participants in the study also had the opportunity to help shape a framework for local, state, and potentially national planning of professional development using a scaffolding model. While the benefits had the potential to be substantial, this study was not without potential risk. Through their shared experiences, it was reasonable to suspect that this topic on the professional development needs of rural superintendents may elicit strong emotions and opinions from the participants. As such, all names of participants and districts are characterized with a pseudonym. All other potentially

identifying data have been altered to protect the identity of the participants and the districts they serve.

Summary

A range of existing literature has pointed to the effectiveness of adopting basic interpretive qualitative research as a viable means for researching superintendent professional development. While the generalizability of any one basic interpretive qualitative study is limited due to the size of research participants, this methodology does present researchers with a rich platform for investigating "what," "why," or "how" questions and presenting a thick description of their findings. In order to investigate how North Carolina rural superintendents, perceive their own professional development needs, I chose to conduct a basic interpretive qualitative study tapping the knowledge through interviews of 12 current mid-career rural school superintendents. In this chapter, I presented an overview of the methodology that I used in order to conduct this study, including participant selection, superintendent participant profiles, data collection methods, and the manner in which the data were analyzed. I have also described for the reader the subjectivity and positionality that I brought to this study as a researcher, former educator, and business executive. In serving in the role of researcher, I was able to make meaning of the participants' words to create a descriptive framework that could help shape professional development offerings for superintendents in the future (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

I will now turn to Chapter IV, where I will present data that I collected and analyzed for this study. Using the conceptual framework described in Chapter I, this

chapter thematically presents qualitative data that I collected through interviews with 12 rural superintendents.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

> You may have heard the world is made up of atoms and molecules, but it's really made up of stories. (William Turner, n.d.)

Introduction

Understanding the perceived professional development needs of rural superintendents will be examined through the voices of 12 current superintendents. This basic qualitative study was conducted in rural school districts across North Carolina. It consisted of an analysis of 12 semi-structured interviews with follow-up questions and interviews as needed. The findings indicate a professional development continuum of offerings is needed to best meet the needs of all superintendents—early career, mid-career, and late career. In this chapter, I present the three themes that emerged from the data and answer each of my four research questions in sequential order. I use direct quotes from my interviews to support both my themes and research questions. The qualitative data obtained from the interviews were rich and reveling, enabling strong support for each theme and finding.

Themes

Themes are patterns across datasets that are important to the description of a phenomenon and are associated with specific research questions. During my data analysis, three overarching themes emerged. I introduce each of the themes, support

them with rich data, and then focus on the answers I found to my research questions. The themes that emerged are:

1. **Mentorship** is essential to growing and developing as a leader and was seen as critical to entering and surviving the superintendency
2. **Networking** builds relationships which help expand knowledge and skills, provides an avenue to discuss vital aspects of a career path, allows the sharing of experiences and stories, and ultimately is paramount for success; and
3. **Serving as a school principal**, with an emphasis on the high school principalship, is vital for successful preparation to the superintendency and is an important learning experience for success as a superintendent.

Mentorship

Mentoring is a system of semi-structured guidance whereby one person shares his/her knowledge, skills, and experience to assist others to progress in their own lives and careers. Mentors need to be readily accessible and prepared to offer help as the need arises—within agreed bounds (McCord 2009). Daloz (1999) suggests that mentors do three things for their mentees: they support, they challenge, and they provide vision. As such, their presence may have a significant effect on how superintendents lead, which is essential to their ability to respond appropriately and effectively to growing complex issues. Mentorship as defined above emerged throughout the data as vital for the growth and development of a leader. It was seen as an essential component to entering and surviving the superintendency. The criticality and essentiality of mentorship were indicated by eleven of the superintendents during the interview process. The

superintendents spoke with reverence and gratitude for the mentor(s) who shepherded them and, in some cases, pushed them toward the superintendency. Mentorships at all stages of their careers were seen as invaluable and necessary. The mentoring needs and roles changed as their journeys advanced to the superintendency but were viewed by most superintendents as critical to their success.

Dr. Lisa Wade has actively sought out mentors throughout her career. It is important to note that Dr. Wade had multiple mentors, both male and female. Dr. Wade discusses the difficulty of finding female mentors due to the small number of females in the superintendency.

> When I was a principal, my mentor, she was the chief academic officer, and she stayed with me and helped me all the way to my role as deputy superintendent . . . when I was becoming a superintendent my mentors transferred over to either current sitting superintendents all-male or the then superintendent that I worked for, . . . It is not for not trying or not working with female mentors . . . There just are not a lot of females out there. . . . for this reason there is just not a lot of female-female sort of mentorship out there.

Dr. Micky Bill has an additional perspective on mentoring. He indicated how critical mentoring was to his advancement. He felt that he owes his success to the mentors that have guided him over the years. Dr. Bill's mentors gave him the ability to have informal conversations and learn from the experiences of his mentors. In short, he was able to avoid mistakes by learning from his mentors.

> I don't think I'd be where I'm at without the mentors and the people that guided me and gave me the opportunities, and trial and error, because I think it's truly, you have to be allowed to make mistakes and learn from it, coming up through the ranks. . . We're human. We make mistakes, and you can't have a zero tolerance on that. . . . years ago, when the superintendents got together, there was a lot

> more informal conversations and over time these conversations become mentoring experiences.

Dr. Tico Johnson made a similar point to Dr. Bill but indicated that trust in the mentor relationship is critical for the mentorship to work. He also discussed how important it was for him to have a mentor as someone off of whom he could bounce ideas.

> You don't get there by accident—you get there by hard work. Having a mentor to keep you balanced and someone you can share tough situations . . . But if you had a mentor within the region that you could bounce ideas off would be ideal . . . and until the superintendents develop a trust, I mean, superintendents are a lot like principals, you have to have an ego to get in some of these jobs and to handle them sometimes.

Dr. Rob Whitman makes the point that mentoring is critical to assist new superintendents in how to deal with parts of the job you can only experience once you are in the job. Having a mentor to show junior superintendent how to handle new responsibilities and challenges is important.

> . . . what you're never prepared for is the job of superintendent that has nothing to do with program supervision and program evaluation, but how you deal with the public, how you deal with commissioners, how you deal with what I would call the micro-political part of being a superintendent. You only get that once you get in the chair, when you have the opportunity to talk to other superintendents and other mentors. That's the only way that I've been able to navigate through that portion.

As indicated above, the participants interviewed found mentoring as a key to navigating the role of the superintendent. Eleven of the 12 participants valued the mentorship experience and viewed their mentors as someone with whom they maintained

a relationship throughout their professional journey. For mentoring to be successful a relationship of trust with someone who has deep experience is imperative (Wallin & Krippen, 2008). Therefore, it is my belief that high-quality mentoring should be widely available to potential and new superintendents in order to broaden the applicant pool to a wider, more diverse group of individuals and to strengthen the probability of success as a superintendent. While mentoring was seen as crucial to navigating the role of superintendent, networking stood out as pivotal to success in the role.

Networking

Networking is the action or process of interacting with individuals to exchange and/or share information. Participation in networking opportunities helps to build professional or social contacts that can broaden professional knowledge, information, and opportunities (Kennedy, 2014). Through varied opportunities for professional development, superintendents can continue to learn both inside and outside of their districts while networking with job-alike colleagues and other professionals who hold or fully understand the complex role of the superintendency (Jazzar & Kimball, 2004). All 12 superintendent participants viewed networking as a critical component to success and informal learning.

Networking provided the superintendents with an avenue to discuss vital aspects of their career path in order to avoid potential roadblocks. Networking also allowed them to share experiences/stories and seek advice. The superintendents enjoy and seek out opportunities to network in formal and informal settings, i.e., informal phone conversations and get-togethers, regional meetings, state-level meetings, and national

meetings. Dr. Mickey Bill points out that networking can be informal. He also discusses how networking can be a source of learning from a group of individuals who have had similar experiences.

> A lot of superintendents that have retired recently...and I meet about every other week, just to ask questions and, "Hey, how did you handle this situation? How did you handle that situation?" Because it's just changing, and the stuff we're dealing with now, I didn't think I'd ever be dealing with this situation.

Dr. Kay Alpha expressed how important it is to build and sustain a network. Dr. Alpha feels that this is an important skill that must be learned. She also sees networking as a way to collaborate in a community of practice with superintendents. Dr. Alpha indicated that she connects during times when she cannot do other tasks such as when she is driving to appointments. She uses this time to make phone calls to keep relationships current. Finally, as with mentoring trust was seen an important trait of individuals in your personal network.

> Learning to build a network and sustaining it, and gathering information from that, because the network is all about connecting to sitting superintendents. And I really think that, in the same way that we ask teachers to collaborate, that we think of a PLC in a school.
>
> Honestly, most of us use long rides home to talk to our network. I'll probably talk to two or three different superintendents . . . I've got two people I've already put in a call to say, "I've got something I want to run by you." It's how I'm going to handle it. I'm going to have somebody, that they're not going to reveal that I called them. I'm going to be able, with complete anonymity, to be able to say what I think, get some feedback, and let that inform what I do.

Dr. Tico Johnson sees statewide networking as important. He serves on the State Superintendent's executive board and works with superintendents from across the state.

Like Dr. Alpha, he views networking as an important way to get help with issues, but this type of networking is formal in nature unlike Dr. Alpha's informal networking.

> I serve on the executive board for the State Superintendent. . . . That's important, that's a priority, having those quarterly superintendent meetings are a priority, because I don't have any other networking opportunities at the state level. At the local level there are monthly meetings that are important, because now I get to see what other superintendents in the region are dealing with and how we're going to address whatever new, unfunded mandate comes our way.

Dr. Rob Whitman expressed a slightly different view on networking than Dr. Johnson or Dr. Alpha. He discussed how national and state organizations play a valuable role in networking. Dr. Whitman points out an existing structure for networking that should be more fully utilized. The structure he discussed included the NCASA, NCSSA, NCDPI, and ASCD and other national organizations.

> I would say that your state association for school administrators and school superintendents are probably the most valuable. There are a whole host of other satellite organizations that you can join, from ASCD, or ASD, or whatever those different organizations may be. But I've found that the state organizations, North Carolina Association of School Administrators, and North Carolina School NCSSA have been the most valuable because you develop relationships with working professionals, and you're able to understand educational issues that are specific to your state. But also, things that you deal with from a national perspective. So those, to me, are the ones that I've found that have been the best.

All 12 superintendents indicated that they find their regional meetings, quarterly superintendent meetings, and informal networking to be excellent venues for networking with peers. They also feel that the North Carolina School Superintendent Association (NCSSA) organization does an excellent job at organizing these networking and professional development events for them. While having a mentor(s) was seen as crucial

to navigating the role of superintendent, and networking stood out as pivotal to success in the role, serving as a principal and specifically a high school principal helped in the preparation of serving in the role as superintendent.

Networking is a critical component to a superintendent's professional development (Jazzar & Kimball, 2004; Kennedy, 2014). Superintendents value networking at the regional, state, and national level. Being able to talk with peers about contemporary events and local district issues was valued by all 12 participants. In my opinion, North Carolina is doing a good job of making sure superintendents have networking opportunities. Sitting superintendents must include potential superintendents in their personal networks and help new and potential superintendents develop the skill of network building and maintenance.

Serving as a Principal with Emphasis on the High School Principalship

A closer look at the standard career paths of men and women in education clearly demonstrates that the pipeline to district-level leadership and the superintendency is through the school principalship, specifically the high school principalship (Maranto, Carroll, Cheng, & Teodoro, 2018). One conceivable explanation is that leaders of high schools tend to be perceived as better candidates for superintendent (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Sargent, 2001), given that high schools are characteristically larger institutions with differentiated missions, more students and staff, larger facilities, greater budgets, more complex structures, and (partly due to athletics) far more community visibility (Maranto et al., 2018).

All 12 superintendent participants viewed the principalship as vital for the successful preparation to the superintendency. They felt that serving as a principal gave immediate credibility for the superintendent amongst the building level principals and the school board. Also, given that the superintendency requires human-resource, political, and leadership expertise, the participants felt that the principalship provided on the job training in many of the areas needed to be successful in job.

All of the former high school principal participants emphasized specifically the high school principal position as critical to their preparation for running a complex organization. Their view was that the high school principalship requires systems thinking that is not as prominent in elementary and middle schools. The high school represents a microcosm of the community and prepares individuals for the superintendency through multi-faceted politics, fast-paced decision-making, budget size and allocation of resources, fundraising, large curricular offerings, extracurricular navigations, community input and dependence, time management, and living in the public eye. While all early career superintendents come to the job with skills from the principalship that help with the job transition, high school principals felt that they were better positioned to transition more quickly and experience earlier success.

When discussing the superintendency and the principalship, Dr. Tim Tapps felt strongly that it is the appropriate training ground for the superintendency. He indicated that he felt the experiences especially at the high school level prepare individuals for the superintendency like no other position. He believes that it gives credibility to a superintendent when supervising principals.

> I think the best training ground for being a superintendent is a high school principalship . . . by and far that's the best training ground because you're going to get the classroom experience, the building level experience, administrative experience, the athletic experience, the political experience. You're going to get it all.
>
> The principalship was the best training ground for me, and now because I've been a principal, my principals respect me. . . . If a principal of mine calls me and has a problem, I feel like I have enough experience that I can help walk them through this problem and really be of help . . . So, I feel like my experience as a building level principal has helped me train to be a superintendent.

Dr. Mark Beta relied on his current superintendent's belief that he did not need to be a high school principal prior to becoming a superintendent and that his middle school principalship was adequate. His journey led him to the district office from the middle school principalship as part of his planned journey to the superintendency. As plans changed, Dr. Beta found himself moving out of the central office into a high school principal position. Dr. Beta now views that off course journey as extremely beneficial to his early success as a superintendent.

> Looking back on it now, I think it was really critical. I had a unique experience because I was a middle school principal, and I came to the central office. The superintendent at that time didn't think I needed that high school experience. That was really a good experience, and I look back and I think that was really beneficial to see . . . To go through that as a high school principal, that to me, looking back, that was a key component in some of the work that we do now as superintendent. I look back and say that was not in the original plan, but at the same time, that year going, that was really important to my early success.

While most superintendents viewed the high school principalship as a highly influential experience needed for successful preparation, all agreed that the principalship

experience in general added tremendous value once in the role as superintendent and that it is critical to establishing credibility and leading principals in a district.

Findings

Mentoring, networking, and the principalship experience were the three themes that emerged from the data as I looked to answer my four research questions based on the data I collected. I viewed my research questions through the lens of my conceptual framework I developed and described in Chapter III, Methodology. In this section I report the findings of my qualitative research study based upon the interview methodology applied to gather the information as outlined in Chapter III. The findings are arranged in sequential order beginning with Research Question 1 and continuing through Research Question 4. I use data that were collected during my one-on-one interviews with the 12 rural superintendent participants to support my findings for each question. The answers to these four questions give insight into the perceptions of professional development needs of superintendents as leaders of a complex organization in rural schools.

1. What do practicing rural North Carolina superintendents perceive their professional development needs to be in leading a complex organization?
2. How do practicing rural North Carolina superintendents get their professional development needs met and how do they decide what to participate in for leadership growth?

3. Are there unique professional development needs for rural novice superintendents (less than 5 years of experience) compared to more experienced rural superintendents (greater than 5 years of experience)?
4. What types of professional development delivery best meet the needs of practicing rural superintendents and to what extent are their needs met or unmet?

Next, I present my findings as they relate to each of these questions. Each finding intertwines with my three overarching themes and give voice to the 12 rural superintendents who participated in this study.

Research Question 1

What do practicing rural North Carolina superintendents perceive their professional development needs to be in leading a complex organization?

Finding: To lead a complex organization, superintendents need professional development based on tactical and managerial topics. Leadership development in combination with mentoring and networking helps a superintendent lead a school district in an efficient and effective manner.

The Superintendents were aligned in identifying the professional development categories needed in order to lead a complex organization, specifically a K-12 public school district in rural North Carolina. The professional development needs of a rural North Carolina Superintendent fell primarily into three categories—tactical, managerial, and leadership development with mentoring and networking being a part of all three categories. Each of the categories are part of a continuum based on the length of time in

the role as superintendent. This continuum will be expanded upon in Research Question 3 below.

No hierarchy was placed on the three categories of professional development needs, meaning no one category is more important than the other. However, the differentiation of when a category is most needed in the role as superintendent was clearly articulated by the superintendent participants and is fleshed out in the answer to Research Question 3.

Tactical topical professional development. The superintendents identified tactical professional development as topical issues such as regulations (class size, use of funding sources, etc.), curriculum (standard course of study changes, multi-lingual student support, etc.), new approaches to instructional delivery (personalized learning, flipped instruction, etc.), and community interaction (gaining support for local bond referendum, explaining new sex education curriculum, etc.). Understanding and interacting with the community was district specific, such as military interaction (working with the local military base), local industry needs (aligning the career and technical education program to support job requirements for new muffler manufacturing facility), marketing the district to the community, etc.

Dr. Mickey Bill supported the idea that tactical professional development is designed to be a support mechanism while a superintendent learns as he/she performs the job. Superintendents are in positions where they have to understand funding sources which is tactical in nature and changes from year to year. Because of the changing nature of specific topics, the need for tactical professional development never goes away.

> Understand what's going on with the low wealth money, and when I was superintendent, it was the small county money. And now the low wealth money here and understand those funding sources and understand what the mission of the legislative body is, in far as education.

Dr. Rob Whitman echo Dr. Bill's thoughts on professional development. Dr. Whitman expresses how laws change yearly and tactical professional development keeps him abreast of the new laws, rules, policy, etc. that have immediate and long-term effects on his district. In our interview, Dr. Whitman talks about the new ESSA laws and his need for understanding the intent and ramifications of the new laws. He also discusses the need to obtain knowledge on current digital teaching and learning and how to utilize best practices as a new instructional practice. Dr. Whitman felt that his participation in this type of tactical professional development informed his decision making and enabled him to take this knowledge back to his district to better support his team.

> . . . where the ESSA law has just passed, so we all need to have the knowledge and understanding of how that affects us all. . . . So, to give you an example, we went through a digital leadership professional development with the Friday Institute. Again, that was a professional development that allowed me to know and understand the kinds of things that I needed to do as it related to digital teaching and learning as superintendent.

Dr. Bill Bear and Dr. Tico Johnson both agree with Drs. Whitman and Bill that tactical professional development is a must in order to be compliant with federal and state laws. Superintendents must stay abreast of all updated and new policy and/or education law. Changes such as class size made by the legislature are tactical in nature and must be communicated in a timely manner in order for immediate changes to be made in the district.

Dr. Bear: North Carolina, and the other states that I've been have the best professional development I've ever experienced. In North Carolina the briefings on class size is just an example. You get legislative updates . . . you get understanding on how to resolve unfunded mandates, strategic planning, etc.—the tactical things for running a district.

Dr. Johnson: Of course, the last couple of years everything's been about ESSA testing and accountability, professional development curriculum whether it be in class, math foundations, reading foundations, guided reading, teacher directed rating, legal updates, policy and law, all those are just a few PD's that I participated in. Plus, generic leadership development and social media.

Managerial professional development. Five major hats for the rural superintendent emerged from Copeland's (2013) study of the expectations of a rural superintendent. The qualitative report identifies manager, planner, listener, communicator, and community life as essential hats that must not only be worn by a rural superintendent but worn well to survive and experience success in a rural district. Managing a school district requires special skills and as such requires special focused professional development. Managerial professional development was identified broadly with special attention given to the areas of human resources (specifically recruiting and retention strategies), politics (navigation of board and local political structures), and financial management (sound financial best practices understanding, capital improvement, and long-term financial planning) by all 12 rural superintendent participants. They agreed that superintendents must be able to manage people and the complex organization they serve (Copeland, 2013).

Dr. Ben Arrow is quick to point out that managing a school district as a new superintendent requires just-in-time professional development. He believes a new superintendent not only needs to fully understand what the job entails but how to actually do the work. He contends that observing the job is quite different from being in the job. Dr. Arrow sees the NCASA as a great resource for new superintendents. Dr. Arrows perspective is important because it shows that new superintendents need more than just on the job training.

> I think again, as a brand-new superintendent, I'm looking for more of a general approach. It's just, what does a superintendent do? . . . it's like going from an assistant principal and the principalship, you think you know what they do, but you don't until you're in that chair. So, staff development helps me continue to clarify that, as a new superintendent. . . . NCASA it is such a wonderful foundation of training that's available for brand new superintendent.

Dr. Rob Whitman echoed what many experienced superintendents have said about beginning the superintendency. Survival requires an understanding of the local and state political landscape: ". . . be involved in PD that helps them to understand the political landscape of what being a superintendent is like."

Dr. Jill Meadow agreed with Dr. Arrows comments on managerial professional development but expands and gives a more specific example. She discussed the need for professional development in human resources and finance. She believes superintendents need to be ready to serve in many different roles wearing numerous hats and able to manage a program if/when the need arises. Dr. Meadow contends that a superintendent must be able to direct programs during a vacancy as well as provide leaders with the direction of a program.

> In the beginning I needed to participate in professional development that was more specific to my job responsibility and skill building for me. . . . the very first year we didn't have an HR person, so I served as the superintendent and the HR director for a year. So I found that between the financial issues we had in one year, not having an HR person in one year, and for the last four years not having a designated lead curriculum person, I've had to hold all hats at a given time as well as run a school system as a superintendent. There's a lot to learn.

Leadership development. Research suggests a positive link between high-quality leadership and successful schools (Bush & Jackson, 2002; Huber, 2004; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004). Leadership development involves building the capacity of individuals and groups to use learning to navigate their way out of problems (Dixon, 1993). System-wide change and growth is therefore dependent on collective leadership capacity (Fullan, 2010; Harris & Jones, 2010). Leadership development, in order to build leadership capacity, is thus a crucial component of professional development for superintendents (Mestry, 2016) and was noted by all 12 rural superintendent participants as a necessity for continued growth and improvement as leaders of a complex organization.

Dr. Mark Beta expressed the need for superintendents to have a clear understanding of who they are as a leader—self-awareness. He believes leadership development is essential to grow and develop as a leader—to grow capacity. Dr. Beta reflected over his career and pointed to a specific time when he participated in a leadership development program that helped him learn how to better lead. He reflects back on this professional development opportunity often and uses this knowledge to impact and lead others.

> I think that leadership development can be a type of professional development, and I think it's something that is needed . . . that might be the most important part of professional development. . . . leadership component's a huge piece of that. One of the things I think that is the best benefit for superintendents is really to grow in your knowledge, yourself as a leader, and how you as a leader impact and lead others. I think that was . . . I draw back on those sessions and those conversations regularly . . . The executive leadership group that we did that had the two sessions, two seasons . . . What I gained from that was how to lead.

Dr. Kay Alpha had a slightly different perspective on leadership and the need for leadership development. Not only did Dr. Alpha indicate the need for leadership development, but she specified that leadership does not always come naturally to individuals in the superintendency.

> Because for a superintendent, you can talk about leadership within your own world . . . I needed to be developed as a leader. How to lead on a large stage. I really had no idea about that. I think that has to be intentional because some people do come to the superintendency with knowledge of how to do that appropriately, but not all of us.

Dr. Tim Tapps agreed with Drs. Alpha and Beta and spoke about several existing quality leadership development opportunities that he has participated that are available for North Carolina Superintendents. Continuing to grow in leadership capacity is such a strong desire for Dr. Tapps that he is now seeking opportunities at the national level.

> . . . at the state level, I've been a part of the Executive Leadership Institute. That's what that certificate that was done through our Superintendents Association . . . NCSSA had another program called Next Generation Superintendents. I personally I'm seeking more of those types of opportunities at the national level now in my career, than state level. Because I just feel like I need to know what's happening around the nation, what's the pulse.

Research Question 1 summary. The professional development needs of superintendents as expressed through the voices of 12 practicing rural superintendents fell primary into three categories—Tactical, Managerial, and Leadership Development. Tactical professional development was superintendent and district specific. They speak of a desire to learn about specific topics to gain better knowledge to successfully understand the job role expectations. Superintendents partake in this type of professional development to gain enough knowledge to start a conversation in the district about a new program initiative, to gain depth of knowledge of an existing program or topic, and/or to learn methods and approaches to communicate with the community. Managerial professional development focused on how to do the actual job of a superintendent. Some of the areas expressed were human resources, policy, school finance, regulations, changes in the law, and new instructional initiatives. The last category of needed professional development was leadership development. It was identified as a professional development need that helped them grow both personally and professionally as a leader. They identified this category as one that can have the greatest impact on moving a district forward.

Research Question 2

> **How do practicing rural North Carolina superintendents get their professional development needs met and how do they decide what to participate in for leadership growth?**
>
> *Finding 1: Rural North Carolina Superintendents direct and select their own professional development learning based on their individual needs and interests.*

Finding 2: The primary means of decision making for professional development participation is based on availability of offerings, opportunities, and location. [Another determining factor of participation selection was where they were on the career continuum. This continuum, in order to avoid repetition, will be fully addressed in the findings section of Research Question 3 below.]

Finding 3: Rural North Carolina Superintendents face few barriers to professional development that are not self-imposed.

Professional development participation. Superintendents depend upon both formal and informal professional development offerings and opportunities for participation. They also consider formal and informal networking to be a much-needed professional development growth activity. The topic of networking for professional development was explored earlier in this chapter as one of three themes that span each of the four research questions.

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) and the North Carolina School Superintendent Association (NCSSA) were named by all 12 rural superintendent participants as the primarily suppliers of formal professional development and formal networking opportunities. Informal networking is obtained primarily through discussions and dialogue with experienced superintendents. In the informal setting, superintendents are able to ask questions, seek advice, and obtain career guidance on topics such as dealing with difficult board members, the implementation of new curriculum materials, and tips on how to negotiate contracts.

Superintendents have little interference and/or guidance as to what professional development opportunities they need or should participate. I think this is due in part to the lack of knowledge and understanding of superintendent professional development needs by local board members combined with apathy on the topic. Therefore, the decision of what to participate in is left solely to the discretion of the individual superintendent. They can choose to participate in local, state, and/or national offerings or not. Superintendents regularly depend on the guidance and recommendations of the NCASS organization and mentors (past supervisors, peers with who they have a strong relationship, university professor, etc.) when committing time to participate in professional development.

Dr. Tim Tapps saw the offerings from NCSSA as strong and highly recommended each offering. He believes that it is important for a superintendent to make time for professional development.

> NCSSA had another program called Next Generation Superintendents . . . that was good because you saw the collegiality that came together when people just came together. Those kinds of things are powerful and really those are not things that you have time for. You have to carve out time . . . I personally I'm seeking more of those types of opportunities at the national level now in my career, than state level. Because I just feel like I need to know what's happening around the nation, what's the pulse.

Dr. Tico Johnson also shared the importance of the NCSSA offerings but adds how the NCSSA quarterly meetings with NCDPI allows superintendents to network and discuss important issues: "The good thing about the North Carolina School

Superintendent's Association is we have quarterly meetings and those are beneficial because superintendents across the state have an opportunity to come together."

Dr. Bill Bear shares Drs. Tapps's and Johnson's sentiments regarding NCSSA and the great job the organization does with providing professional development opportunities of high quality. However, Dr. Bear is much more enthusiastic and is very content with what is available to him currently. He did not express any need for training outside what NCSSA provides: "The director of the NCSSA does a bang-up job of giving us opportunities to come and learn, and grow, network, we share ideas, we take those ideas, we pirate those ideas and bring them home and make them fit."

Dr. Ben Arrow recognized the importance of NCSSA but also indicated that The North Carolina Association of School Administrators (NCASA) as the "umbrella" organization also provides high quality professional development opportunities for superintendents.

> The North Carolina Association School Administrators (NCASA) is the primary professional organization and course, within that umbrella we have the state principal's association and the state superintendents' association. But that's the primary go to organization I work at for conferencing and professional development.

Dr. Jill Meadow agrees with Dr. Bear that the variety and quality of professional development provided by NCSSA is excellent. She expressed her growth as a superintendent has primarily come from the NCSSA programs and the Executive Leadership Cohort (supported by NCSSA).

> But at the state level, there isn't anything at the state level. It's been North Carolina School Superintendents' Association (NCSSA), I have been to the NCSSA Next Generation Superintendents training, out of my four years, I've done it twice already, and I'm going to do it again. I signed up for it this year. That and the experience that we had with the executive leadership cohort, by far if I hadn't had those two professional development opportunities, I wouldn't have grown as a superintendent. But that's all that's available to us.

Dr. Kay Alpha agreed with the perspective of the other superintendents but stressed the networking portion as the most beneficial component. She sees this time as critical to getting advice from other superintendents on contemporary issues. She views the regular meetings as a great time for networking. Dr. Alpha also indicated that these meetings allow superintendents to build their own networks.

> The quarterly meetings provide an opportunity for some networking. Not necessarily in that actual meeting, yes, but generally, you know, if you have to stay before or after different groups there, and then for me the other opportunity has been through our regional consortium. We meet regularly and so, you kind of build a network of other folks who are dealing with the same issue. I think that's been helpful.

Decision process for participation in professional development.

Superintendents are mostly pragmatic when deciding what professional development, they are willing to participate. Time away from the district typically enters their minds first before pursuing any opportunities. Therefore, location involving travel time and duration of professional development has weight in the decision-making process. Next, superintendents look at the quality of the professional development and/or potential personal and professional benefits. The judgement of quality is garnered through personal perceptions and the recommendations from respected colleagues. Last,

superintendents use their self-assessment of skills, knowledge, and leadership gaps determined by a combination of assessments when available, personal self-assessment, feedback from coaches/mentors/peers, and evaluations from their local board of education to make a final decision as whether to participate. The local Board of Education, to whom they directly report, has almost no input and has little interest in the selection and/or decision process of professional development for their superintendent. Professional development decisions reside with the superintendent. Superintendents are responsible for informing their boards regarding their absence from the district for professional development. The board also approves the superintendent's professional development budget.

Dr. Lisa Wade discussed a women's leadership conference she wants to attend. This is a topic that was of personal interest for her. The key the decision points for her was that the conference was of no cost to the district and that time away from the district was spread over the course of a year. This illustrates her use of the trifecta of decision making which is personal or professional interest, cost, and time away from the district.

> . . . For example, this women's leadership that I'm getting ready to do, I'm going to be in DC six times throughout the year, so I needed to make sure the board was okay and comfortable with that. Now the professional development is being paid for by grants so there's not a cost to the district.

Dr. Arnold made professional development participation decisions through a similar lens as Dr. Wade. However, Dr. Arnold also considered who the intended audience target was for the offering and how participating in the offering aligned with her personal/professional goals.

> You know, time and money are part of it, but really for me, the situations I've had to consider time away, and whether I think that is going to be a solid return on that investment of time. Is it worth being away? Do I feel like there's something that I'm going to learn that I may not have known before? And then that . . . Also, who's going to be participating? . . . Who's the audience this is intended for? Because if this is intended for principals and not superintendents, then really the session is not going to be a benefit for me . . . so making sure that it's aligned with what my goals are, what I would I think I need to learn more about. . . . If it's really time intensive then that's when I need to make a decision about whether it's worth the time away to do that.

Dr. Tico Johnson shares a similar participation decision making process as Drs. Arnold and Wade but is also concerned with whether the professional development is research based and how it will enhance the district: "The topic of personal professional interest, areas that would help me enhance the district and is it researched based? Is this just another vendor, a salesman trying to pitch their software or whatever, you know?"

Dr. Tim Tapps did not reference cost or time away from the district as concerns for participating in professional development opportunities. Instead his focus was on attending opportunities that are relevant to him and will benefit the district he serves. Dr. Tapps frowns upon sales presentations that are disguised as professional development, but rather learning from in-the-trenches panelists that has proven strategies to share.

> . . . I look at the presenters, I look at the substance. I am going to the school safety meeting later this month in July actually. But that's a topic that's relevant. Is the information relevant? Are you just trying to sell me a program? Like I said, I like things that I can take away and bring back to my folks, give me a tool kit, show me best practices. I love panels. Yeah, bring in rich panelists, people that are in the work doing the work that have the results, and they're not somebody's best friend that they're trying to get advancement by putting them on a panel.

Dr. Bill Bear agrees with Dr. Tapps that the professional development participation should bring value back to the district. However, his first focus is on the agenda and whether or not it can help shape him as a leader. Dr. Bear has a strong desire to learn and wants to attend opportunities that will enhance his knowledge of self.

> I look for a program that leaves me with an immense feeling, an understanding, of who I am today and who I'm going to be tomorrow. I look at the number of sessions. The agenda that they put out, it's very important. It's disappointing when it comes to the last day, cause you kind of get into it and you'd like to learn more. I'm a, I guess you'd say, a geek, because I like the classroom setting. I think it's really cool. I want information that's going to fill my leadership toolbox with various notes, deals, activities, and articles that I can reflect upon.

Finally, Dr. Jill Meadow shares a decision point not made by the other superintendents. She has an immense desire to attend professional development opportunities that will increase her own knowledge, build the capacity in her district, and/or help her build capacity in another individual.

> Do I believe I'm going to gain something that is going to . . .? It doesn't necessarily always have to help me and my learning and my professional growth, but something that I can utilize and transfer to be able to help build capacity for someone else, a different way of approaching things or helping me differentiate.

Professional development barriers. Formal barriers regarding professional development participation is almost nonexistent for North Carolina rural superintendents. The two primary barriers that do exist are self-imposed. Superintendents feel that time out of the district is a major deterrent for participating in professional development. First, they feel that the superintendent must be present in order to lead. Being present means physically, emotionally, and relationally. The complexity of the job keeps many

superintendents from taking time away for personal professional development growth. Many times, perception and management concerns preclude their participation and time away from the district. The second barrier that limits superintendents' participation in professional development is financial. Even though superintendents have discretionary money and/or contract negotiated professional development monies that can be used for their individual professional development needs, many see spending the money as a potential negative perceptual issue for their constituents. This can be especially true if the cost is seen as expensive and the location as luxurious. Therefore, superintendents must weigh many political dynamics when making a professional development participation determination.

Dr. Mickey Bill is concerned about the negative perception that can be generated when superintendents attend professional development that requires expensive travel. In short superintendents must be mindful of perceptions.

> Perceptions. "He's flying out to here. He's flying out there." A lot of the national conferences. Yeah, you're going to convention centers, cities. I'm not sure I'm going to AASA. This year, it's in Los Angeles. I think the cheapest hotel room I saw was $700 a night. Was right downtown. There again then, to get downtown, that's going to be expensive, expensive, expensive conference. . . . You see the leadership flying here, flying there. There're costs, there's perception. It's usually in high-end hotels.

Dr. Lorie Arnold shares the same view on barriers as Dr. Mickey with an extra caveat. She is concerned with the perception that she is pampering herself by traveling to a professional development activity. Furthermore, she is mindful of the constituent perception as to why the superintendent would need additional training.

> If you're going out of state, there's a little bit of perception that if you're going to professional development that you're . . . away from the district, and so there's that. So, I think there are people probably who would scrutinize that. And then you also, when resources are limited there's a perception of . . . that you're pampering yourself. I think there's also a little bit of a perception of why do you need professional development.

Dr. Tico Johnson expressed a different concern. The time commitment is always a concern for him when participating in professional development. He views the superintendency as a 24 hours a day, 7 days a week job or lifestyle. He feels that being away from the district will create a void.

> Well, I think the time commitment I mentioned earlier is that you feel like you can't be away from this job and you can't because it's not a job, it's a lifestyle. I mean, that's what it is, it's 24/7 and you have to be all in with it. Then you have to be very mindful that everything you go and do . . .

Unlike his peers, Dr. Rob Whitman does not see insurmountable barriers to attending professional development. He sees nonparticipation in professional development as a personal detriment.

> If I say barriers, I can't necessarily identify any particular barriers that you can't overcome. I mean, I would say any barrier would be self-inflicted. If a rural superintendent is not willing to spend the time or the effort to engage in professional development, I would say that is to their own detriment.

Dr. Bill Bear shares many of the sentiments of his colleagues and is concerned that time away from the district may impact operational decision making, such as weather-related decisions. However, Dr. Bear values professional development and views it as a personal investment in oneself and is willing to personally fund an opportunity if it will help him

become better in his job, support his district goals, or benefit students' growth and opportunity.

> Okay, some barriers. We are out of district. If it's not a webinar, which I think webinars are good, but you're out and you need to be in your district, especially in the winter time, because that's when you have some weather situations you got to make a call on, the cost. When you're at a small school, rural, low wealth county, you got to figure out how you're going to pay for it. With the AASA, the cost I'm putting it out of my own hip pocket, but it's going to benefit me, and my district, and my students.

Research Question 2 summary. North Carolina rural superintendents mainly have their professional development needs met from two state-level organizations: the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) and the North Carolina School Superintendent Association (NCSSA). Superintendents may also participate in Regional Education Service Associations (RESA) professional development offerings. However, the RESA professional development varies across the state depending on leadership, organization, and commitment of the area school districts.

The NCDPI provides primarily technical and informational training, while the NCSSA provides developmental and leadership professional development. The NCSSA offerings are targeted for beginning and mid-career superintendents and vary yearly. These offerings to support their growth and development, are viewed as relevant and timely by superintendents. The RESA allows superintendents an opportunity to network locally and to learn specific technical information with little developmental or leadership professional development offered.

Interests needed skills and knowledge, and self-assessed leadership gaps were seen as the main determinants when choosing to participate in a specific professional development opportunity. Superintendents indicated that the acquisition of new knowledge, skills, and tools that will be useful to the district is critical for a professional development activity to be considered. It was essential to all the superintendent participants that the cost benefit be positive for the district in which they serve. Fiscal conservatism and negative perceptions from constituents were viewed as the main barriers for participation.

Research Question 3

Are there unique professional development needs for rural novice superintendents (less than five years of experience) compared to more experienced rural superintendents (greater than five years of experience)?

Finding: Professional development needs in leading a complex organization varies on a continuum and is highly correlated to longevity in the position—early career, mid-career, and late-career.

Early career perceived professional development needs. Early career superintendents face complex organizational challenges that require the rapid development of new and agile leaders. They must quickly learn and deploy core management skills, develop a broad strategic perspective, employ strong leadership skills, and expand their professional and personal networks (Ryan, 2010). In this stage, the new superintendent's professional development needs are mainly tactical activities

such as learning the job, understanding their new role, interpreting board expectations, uncovering how the district operates, etc.

Dr. Mark Beta speaks directly to the challenges of a new or early career superintendent. Early career superintendents or new superintendents are acquiring the skills necessary to perform the role of superintendent and to work with their local board of education—to survive.

> It's kind of like all about you being able to survive the superintendency and what have I signed up for and what is this all about, again, only four years, but now to be able to grow leaders. I think it's kind of like you move to develop leaders and leaders in that philosophy. I don't know where that really changed. I think probably between years two and three.

Like Dr. Beta, Dr. Lisa Wade espouses the need for early career superintendents to prioritize tactical professional development especially targeted toward basic responsibilities of the superintendent and working within the politics of the job.

> You don't know what you don't know until you're in this job . . . I mean yes, everybody needs continued leadership training but some of the sort of nuts and bolts and particularly the political issues . . . I think that's where it's important for professional development to be more differentiated or customized to that particular level of the superintendent.

Dr. Bill Bear while not a new superintendent is new to North Carolina. He found that coming to the state required him to acquire knowledge specific to North Carolina. Additionally, Dr. Bear discusses the need for networking with his peers to gain further clarity on contemporary topics such as class size:

> When I first came to North Carolina, I was in Virginia, Colorado, North Carolina, three states, three different ways of how they handle things. When you become a superintendent, you really don't know what's going on, and you can go to a professional development and maybe you'll get it, and maybe you won't get it. But you have to stay with it. What I mean by that is, we've been talking about class size forever, okay? The more that you hear your colleagues sit around the table and talk about class size, that helps you out.

Dr. Ben Arrow echoes Drs. Bear, Wade, and Beta's view that new or early career superintendents need professional development that is designed to help them be successful in the role of superintendent.

> I think again, as a brand-new superintendent, I'm looking for more of a general approach. It's just, what does a superintendent do? I mean, that sounds sort of too simple, . . . you think you know what they do, but don't until you're in that chair. And so, staff development helps me continue to clarify that, as a new superintendent, it sounds a little simplistic, but I think that for me, it was so true.

Dr. Rob Whitman expanded upon the needs of a new or early career superintendent. Dr. Whitman sees a progression of the professional development needs of the superintendent. He sees different needs from the first year to later years. He does agree with his peers that early career superintendents need basic nuts and bolts training on how to perform in the role of the superintendent.

> I think it is important to tailor professional development for the changing needs of a superintendent because if I'm a first-year superintendent, a second-year superintendent, then my PD needs are totally different than an experienced superintendent . . . But as a new superintendent, there are things that you need to help you understand the nature of the job.

Mid-career perceived professional development needs. Mid-career superintendents continue to face complex organizational challenges that require tactical

measures of working in a political landscape; however, their survival as superintendent becomes much more focused on board relationships, state politics, and taking their leadership skills to the next level of development. In this stage, the mid-career superintendent has mostly learned how to work with their local education board but desires to enhance the relationships. Mid-career superintendents become more focused on growing as a leader, being a leader of leaders, and coaching and growing leaders—especially at the principal school level of leadership.

Dr. Jill Meadow clearly articulates that basic job responsibilities and daily survival skills are no longer desired when seeking professional development opportunities as mid-career superintendent. Dr. Meadow looks for more advanced opportunities that stimulate reflection.

> In the beginning I needed to participate in professional development that was more specific to my job responsibility and skill building for me, whereas now it doesn't necessarily have to be that, but it must . . . but both over this period of four years it's definitely had to have opportunities for me to reflect embedded within the PD or require me to do so in between sessions. So, now I don't necessarily have to take . . . Finance 101. I'm not looking for things like that anymore.

Dr. Kay Alpha is very specific about her mid-career needs. She wants to tackle complex issues such as politics and school board relations. This is a common thread for both early-career and mid-career superintendents: "We need intense work with superintendents on, the superintendent board relations and kind of what I feel like some lessons I've learned the hard way. I think could be beneficial, as well."

Dr. Mark Beta reflects on a professional development experience he had as a mid-career superintendent. He participated in a leadership development program that he still draws on today. It helped him understand himself as a leader. He feels that this type of training is very beneficial for the mid-career superintendent.

> When I think about the Leadership Executive Program that some of us had the opportunity to participate in . . . One of the things . . . I think the best benefit is really to grow in your knowledge, yourself as a leader, and how you as a leader impact and lead others . . . I draw back on those sessions and those conversations regularly.

Dr. Mark Beta reiterates Dr. Meadow's thoughts on the need to move away from tactical professional development as a mid-career superintendent. Dr. Beta discusses his need to grow as a leader and to help grow others in leadership.

> I think it is kind of like you move from nuts and bolts to development of leaders . . . I don't know where that really changed. I think probably between years two and three. That goes along with some of the stuff that we've done. To be able to get there . . . There's a natural process in the professional development of me and probably all superintendents to be like I've got my legs under me now a little bit. Now I've kind of got a clue about the procedural stuff of what's going on here. Now I need to grow as a leader, but also, I need to grow my team as leaders.

Dr. Kay Alpha repeats what several of her peers have clearly seen as a continual need as superintendents advance in longevity—the need for professional development on school board relations. While mid-career superintendents have progressed from the initial relationship building and working with their local boards of education, the need still exists for advanced professional development given the political dynamic working relationship: "We need intense work with superintendents on, the superintendent board

relations and kind of what I feel like some lessons I've learned the hard way. I think could be beneficial, as well."

Dr. Rob Whitman adds an additional perspective on the professional development needs of mid-career superintendents: he espouses the need to understand the rural communities' economic and political makeup. Furthermore, he believes the mid-career superintendent must be knowledgeable and trained on the rural/suburban/urban divide in order to better represent and meet the needs rural districts.

> I would say PD that helps you understand the economic structure and makeup of rural districts, the barriers that they have. Professional development that talks about innovation, the things that you can do in a rural district. Professional development that helps you to understand the difference in the rural communities versus suburban or urban communities because there is a difference. There is a different kind of expectation.

Dr. Lorie Arnold sees the need for professional development on instructional innovation when she reaches the mid-career stage of her superintendency. At the mid-career stage, she believes she would want to focus on innovation that would help grow the district.

> I would imagine that as I become more comfortable in the role, there are going to be things that I see that I could build on knowledge, that I maybe just I'm not aware of yet. Because right now I'm just trying to deal with things in pretty general way to make sure that we're moving forward . . . I could envision that there are some specific instructional focus areas that we could grow as a district that it would benefit the district and me to learn more about, and be more grounded in so that I could help that inform our work.

Late-career perceived professional development needs. Facing complex organizational challenges continues throughout the longevity of the superintendency.

The late-career superintendent, having accomplished the tactical skills, having grown as a leader, and having developed other leaders, now turns his/her attention to the development and mentoring of district-level leaders. The late-career superintendent desires to give back to the profession and to help develop, shape, and mentor future superintendents. Additionally, they have a strong desire to align their professional development with the district's implementation of a new initiative or innovative idea. This professional development tends to be topic specific in order to lead the organization during a period of implementation. The following data speak directly to the perceived professional development needs of the late-career superintendent.

Dr. Mickey Bill indicates his need is for more advanced professional development that are district specific—such as working with the military and district branding. Dr. Bill desires professional development that is district centric and will support district growth and opportunity.

> . . . it's just where I'm at developmentally and in my career. I spend a bigger portion of my team with the Military Impact, because the whole DoDEA thing is a different shooting match. A lot of the things I'm doing, like with the branding and working with the corporate sponsors and stuff is uncharted.

Dr. Bill Bear discusses the need for strategic planning with the community as an advanced professional development topic. He sees this topic far removed from the nuts and bolts type of professional development for the early career superintendents.

> You get legislative updates from the NCSSA, you get understanding on how to resolve unfunded mandates, strategic planning . . . I think this is really cool. I listened to a NC superintendent recently and he did a presentation on how to put a strategic plan together for the community, and get their input, and their buy-in,

> and they're taking ownership. That's where I'm at now . . . away from the nuts and bolts stuff.

Dr. Ben Arrow's focus is more on the development of district leaders. He wants to ensure that the leaders in his district are ready for the next challenge. Overall his professional development needs are specific and narrow.

> . . . Now, later on my career, it's more of a laser focus . . . and this is where I need some additional help on best practice right now . . . or this is where I need help to make a prediction about what particular skills or curriculum pace do I need to focus on to have that particular person ready for what's ahead of them. So, it really narrowed itself, more specialized . . .

Last, Dr. Tim Tapps dives into great detail about the need for self-improvement and self-actualization at the late career stage. He feels that late career superintendents are trying to improve themselves so that they can be better at the job, become a better person, and leave the district in a good place once they move on.

> They have a program called The Peaks, and it's a weeklong experience. And I think it's one of those mind body, soul experiences where the CEOs and staff, people go to. So, that's one that I think it's pretty hefty in expenses, but that's the kind of thing that I would seek out . . . It's one of those where you really, you dive deeply into you and what makes you tick, and what are your triggers? That helps you become a better father, a husband, and a better superintendent. Yeah. Those are the kinds of things that at this stage in my career that I would be seeking out.

Research Question 3 summary. As North Carolina rural superintendents progress through their careers in longevity of service, the perceived professional development needs progress along a continuum (stair steps) from tactical to systems leadership to leadership development of others (mentorship) as illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Perceived Professional Development Continuum.

Early career superintendents desire mostly tactical professional development—in other words, the nuts and bolts of how to perform the job. Superintendents view learning the basics of the role, board expectations, and district operations as critical.

Mid-career NC rural superintendents perceive their professional development needs to be in the areas of systems leadership—leading a complex organization, cultivating board relationships and understanding the full dynamics of local, state, and national politics. Superintendents at this career stage desire to further develop themselves as leaders in order to improve their ability to coach principals, other district leaders, and to have a lasting impact on the district they serve. Mid-career superintendents look for leadership development opportunities with colleagues who are at the same career stage or with more longevity.

Late-career rural NC superintendents perceive their professional development needs more broadly with a desire to have lasting impact on future generations of school leaders. They seek opportunities to develop and mentor future and current district-level

leaders. Late-career superintendents almost feel compelled to build leadership capacity within the district in order to ensure continuity and sustainment of the districts progress. In short, late-career superintendents want to the leave the school district in good hands and better than they found it. Superintendents at the late-career stage also enjoy leading innovation implementation such as a, Spanish immersion program or personalized learning, which requires specialized professional development that is topic specific. Many times, the topical professional development is related to a district initiative and/or personal interest. At this stage in the career, rural superintendents seek professional development to implement new or improve existing district programs. For example, superintendents may want to participate fully in the revamping of the career and technical education program to meet new and future employer expectations. This is a means for the rural superintendent to be in the trenches again—to "get their hands wet"—to come full circle of front-line leadership.

In Chapter V, a professional development blueprint is introduced that can be adopted by NCDPI, NCSSA, and the General Assembly. This blueprint will lay out the professional development needs of superintendents in each stage of their career. The blueprint will give all the organizations that provide professional development to superintendents a clear roadmap of how to assist superintendents in their professional development needs.

Research Question 4

What types of professional development delivery best meet the needs of practicing rural superintendents and to what extent are their needs met or unmet?

Finding: Rural North Carolina superintendents prefer an in-person delivery method for all forms of professional development with the exception of mentoring and or coaching for professional development which may be delivered via phone, video conference, and/or an in-person meeting on occasion.

Sub-finding: Rural North Carolina superintendent participants (n=4) with more than seven years of experience in the superintendency are open to virtual delivery for informational and tactical professional development.

Practicing North Carolina rural superintendents are protective of their time. They see time in finite terms and as a precious commodity. They also value networking and mentorship causing a tension when considering what professional development opportunities to partake. North Carolina rural superintendents limit the time they are away from their district and therefore saw the mode of delivery for professional development to be contingent upon need and quality versus time.

All North Carolina rural superintendent participants preferred face-to-face interaction when learning and networking. However, the caveat was made that mentoring and/or coaching could be delivered via phone, video conference, or in an electronic format on occasion. In their minds, attending professional development comes at the expense of the everyday running of the school district. Therefore, superintendents weigh

the worth and value of the specific professional development against the time it will take away from the district and the value it will bring to them both personally and professionally. Superintendents are always doing a cost-benefit analysis on professional development participation. The view espoused by these rural superintendents was that the delivery method preferences for professional development is based on the type of activity, the assigned value and benefit, and the time involved to participate.

Informational and tactical professional development delivery. All rural superintendent participants felt that informational or tactical professional development should be delivered via conference call or video conference such as web ex. An example of topics that would lend themselves to virtual updates would be legal, school finance, and NCDPI rules/regulation changes. There was agreement that mentoring could be delivered via phone, video conference, and in-person on occasion.

Dr. Kay Alpha clearly prefers virtual delivery for tactical and informational professional development. She sees the quick delivery of information with minimal time commitment to be important and advantageous. Dr. Alpha likes virtual delivery because unlike a memo or e-mail she can ask questions.

> I think it depends on the content of the professional development. I think some things, a webinar for dispersion of general information, changes in policy, etc. I actually always loved when the NCDPI CFO and State Superintendent did the webinars about the state budget . . . virtual delivery is good when there's a change in the law and an issue is moving very quickly.
>
> You know, the webinar provided a way to get it out there to everybody, where if you're waiting for a quarterly meeting to be face-to-face, those are always so preset. The ability to use the online tools to get that information out quickly, and I like the webinar, because unlike an email, you have an opportunity to ask questions as part of it.

While Dr. Mickey Bill likes virtual delivery, unlike Dr. Alpha, he prefers using conference calls over webinars. He prefers this method of delivery so that he can accomplish other tasks while waiting for the agenda items that are important to him. Virtual delivery is seen as a time saving option which superintendents prefer.

> It's just information we're getting out, and our board of directors, we do that. I'm the one that'll do it on the phone. I don't pull it up on the computer because I can sit there and look at emails while I'm listening to it, and we have an agenda we get through, and we're done.

Dr. Ben Arrow, like his peers, enjoys the flexibility of virtual delivery. He notes that virtual delivery provides the opportunity to get time sensitive information out quickly which is helpful to superintendents.

> I think because of the nature of the job more and more; we're looking at the flexibility piece that online training provides. I think it's just the environment that we're learning that's like relearning, I guess I have learned through the years to become more comfortable with virtual delivery I think that it addresses important time sensitive issues.

Mentoring professional development delivery. Rural North Carolina Superintendents indicated that building a relationship is essential for mentoring. Mentoring was mentioned as an important and even necessary professional development throughout each interview and as an answer for each research question. Therefore, making it a theme in my findings as discussed earlier in this chapter. The rural superintendent participants agreed that electronic/virtual mentoring can be an effective mode of delivery once a relationship has been established with the preferred delivery method being face-to-face.

Dr. Mark Beta indicated that face-to-face delivery is preferred during the initial and trust building stages of mentoring. Once that trust has been built and the relationship matures virtual mentoring is viewed as acceptable.

> I would say yeah, there's a place for virtual. But I think for it to be long-lasting and long-serving, it has to be more of the relationship, the face-to-face, the connection mentoring, coaching kind of thing . . . That in-person visit then opened up the opportunity to be able to say okay, phone call. You have to build trust. For me, that's done in person . . . You've got to have that relationship before I let you into that inner circle of confidence, if you will.

Dr. Rob Whitman agreed with Dr. Beta that mentoring can take place virtually but differs slightly in that he feels that multiple options for mentoring should be available.

> There are components that you could do virtually. For example, you talk about the mentoring piece, mentor and mentee. My mentor and I certainly could have done that telephonically, or chat session. I think it would have been as effective. But again, just multiple options of how you do mentoring.

Dr. Kay Alpha concurs that virtual mentoring can be valuable and effective in the right setting. She especially enjoys the ease of use as a mentor and mentee. Having access to a thought partner immediately through virtual delivery really helps when advice or suggestions are needed quickly.

> so a lot of people can give you advice . . . I love being able to pick up the phone and call these (mentors) people and now that I'm a thought partner, it is not that Kay Alpha's here and she's the mentor superintendent that knows all the answers, it's really leading a discussion.

Dr. Lisa Wade added a slightly different perspective on the specific delivery means. While other superintendents have viewed virtual delivery as a video chat,

webinar, or telephone call, Dr. Wade specifically named e-mail as a way to seek advice from her mentor. She also agreed with the previous superintendents that face-to-face mentoring has an important place especially in establishing trust.

> The majority of the mentoring was in person, but we also did some over the phone and via email. I had a couple sort of, I don't want to say crises because that's too strong of a word but a couple situations where at ten o'clock at night I shot him an email and said, "What would you do?" And in the next morning he would either call me or I'd have an email my inbox and we'd work through it. But again, I had a chance to build a relationship with *my mentor* that . . . I knew him as the past superintendent . . . now he's somebody who I know that I can call and really count on, and I think having that face-to-face interaction allowed us to do that.

Face-to-face delivery methods. All North Carolina rural superintendents espoused that face-to-face delivery for leadership and career development professional development was their preferred delivery method. This decision was based largely on the fact that networking is one of the main reason's superintendents choose to participate in professional development. They see networking, as explored earlier in this chapter as a theme, as vital to their success in the role as superintendent and also as an essential leadership developmental growth component. Networking with peers in the same role/position is their valued professional learning community and they believe that it can only be done effectively when in the same physical space with an opportunity to dialogue face-to-face. Networking with peers is seen as critical due to the singularity of the role in a district.

Superintendents must leave their districts in order to seek same role/job information, feedback, and advice. It is during small group face-to-face conversations in a forum type setting that superintendents feel best suited to build trust with another

superintendent. The rural superintendent participants also expressed face-to-face encounters with experts where true dialogue could take place as important for their professional growth. Finally, superintendents want to be in a learning environment where they can actively engage, grow, share, and develop if they are going to invest the time and be away from their district.

Dr. Tico Johnson stated emphatically that face-to-face delivery was his preference when participating in professional development. He enjoys direct interaction with colleagues and that virtual delivery should not be done beyond tactical and informational topics.

> Active participation. I don't need to . . . for me a module or something online that's not interactive, nay. I like face-to-face, I don't particularly care for a Google hangout or any other platform, Internet-based. I like face-to-face active participation.

Dr. Tim Tapps reiterates Dr. Johnson's preferences regarding a strong desire for face-to-face interaction over virtual delivery when participating in professional development opportunities. Activities that allow movement and interaction are critical for his particular learning style. The desire for interaction during professional development was a preference expressed by most of the superintendents. Dr. Tapps expanded on the face-to-face delivery preferences by indicating his preference for small group interaction.

> . . . I like face-to-face. I like group settings. I like when we can work together. I know CCL uses this model where they do a little teaching and a little practice, a little teaching and a little practice. And I liked that. Gets you up on your feet, you're doing some activities and you're not sitting. You know, I get the most

> when I can apply what I'm learning in a group setting. I have time to discuss it and I can't just take in all this information for eight straight hours or for sometimes eight straight minutes. It's good to have things broken up. So that's probably what works best for my learning style. I've also learned that I'm good at writing stuff down.

Dr. Ben Arrow expanded on the need for face-to-face professional development delivery. He stated that the networking part of face-to-face professional development is important. He sees value in sitting down with his peers and having discussions. This was a common sentiment among the 12 rural superintendent participants.

> I say that in the aspect of professional development that it should just be the face-to-face, the networking, sitting down at the table with the other four-three superintendents in the region, and hearing what their particular concerns are that week. Or what the issues are, because you are going to relate to a lot of that and it has to be face-to-face.

Dr. Bill Bear agrees with Drs. Tapps and Johnson on the need for face-to-face delivery of professional development. He also concurs that the delivery style of the person leading the professional development must be interactive allowing the participants to create thought partners. It is his belief that the thought partners will last long after the professional development has ended.

> I like the presenter getting up and we just listen. But also, I like indirect too, where there's a lot of feedback, participation. I think that, right there, is more my style. I like the hands on, I like round table discussion, and I also like partner discussion, because we have something, they're called thought partners. You sit in, you talk about things, and you make sure I know a way to handle a situation that you didn't think of. I think those are good.

Dr. Lisa Wade has a slightly different view on the delivery of professional development. She believes in prework so that the time spent during the professional development session is productive. She concurs with Dr. Bear that small group interaction is important to the success of face-to-face professional development.

> I like the blended approach, where you spend some time face-to-face. Where you spend some time reading or preparing prior to or after. Where you come together and have small group time or table talk, whatever you want to call it, but I also like the time where you have somebody that follows behind you and that coaches, that checks in, that you can reflect and problem-solve with.

Research Question 4 summary. Practicing North Carolina rural superintendents are concerned about the amount of time they spend away from their district since time is finite and they have many things to do in leading a complex organization. Networking and mentorship opportunities are important components and they prefer face-to-face interaction as opposed to virtual for almost all types of offerings. Participating in professional development is continually analyzed by the type of activity, the assigned value and benefit, and the time involved to participate.

Overall Summary of Research Questions 1–4

In this chapter, I discussed the three themes that emerged throughout the study. I answered each of my four research questions using direct quotes from the data to support my findings. An attempt was made to provide interview data from all 12 rural superintendent participants to support my findings. Some conversations were more vibrant and yielded more data, thus having some superintendent represented more than others. The first-year superintendent participant lacked depth of knowledge in some of

my questions given her longevity in the position and personal experiences with regards to her own professional development needs. This resulted in less robust data collected and therefore less analysis could be made and/or used to support my findings. The remaining eleven participants provided plentiful data as is evident in my narratives.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I introduced three themes that emerged from the data—Mentoring, Networking, and Serving as a Principal, with emphasis on the high school principalship, supporting each theme with rich data selections. I gave an in-depth description with supporting data to answer each of my four research questions in sequential order through the presentation of my findings. As I turn to Chapter V, I critique my conceptual framework, discuss my final conclusions, implications, and share my closing thoughts. The rich qualitative data that supported my themes and recommendations are used as a basis for my recommendations to multiple audiences. I also present a blueprint that can be used when planning for professional development for superintendents and specifically rural superintendents. The blueprint was constructed utilizing the three themes and findings presented in this chapter giving voice to my 12 research participants.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CLOSING THOUGHTS

> When you get where you're goin' don't forget turn back around
> help the next one in line always stay humble and kind. ~ Tim McGraw, 2015

Today's leaders, such as superintendents, must be systems thinkers and be able to think critically (Senge, 2006). Superintendents as the leaders of complex organizations use systems thinking to make the connection and alignment of all the district's discrete parts and the relationship among the parts as well as navigating the complexity of a school district (Senge, 2006). The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of the professional development needs of superintendents as leaders of a complex organization in rural schools. This qualitative study tapped the knowledge through interviews of 12 current mid-career rural North Carolina school superintendents. The results reflected the research cited in the literature review presented in Chapter II. My findings and themes indicate the professional development needs of rural superintendents across the United States and echo my basic belief of helping others to achieve what you have achieved, and is powerfully captured in the lyrics of Tim McGraw's song *Humble and Kind*. I end this chapter with a professional development blueprint that can be used when planning professional development for rural superintendents who lead complex organizations.

Conceptual Framework Critique

In this section, I critique my conceptual framework, which was visually represented with a funnel design and then align each concept with my findings. I created the funnel design image after a comprehensive review of the literature (Chapter II). The funnel, a tube-like structure with a wide conical mouth and a narrow trunk, was used to channel the three significant components (represented by balls) occurring simultaneously—the role and position of the superintendent, leading a complex organization, and rural district challenges, to determine the perceived professional development needs of the 12 North Carolina rural superintendent participants (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Conceptual Framework Revisited.

Leading a Complex Organization Alignment

Superintendents gain knowledge of how to lead a complex organization through mentoring, networking, and professional development. The superintendency is a unique position with the school district because they have no peer. Because of the singular nature superintendents must seek professional development outside the district. In order to lead a complex district, the superintendent must obtain the skills necessary to successfully lead the district which by nature is complex.

- Finding: To lead a complex organization, superintendents need professional development based on tactical and managerial topics. Leadership development in combination with mentoring and networking helps a superintendent lead a school district in an efficient and effective manner.
- Finding: Professional development needs in leading a complex organization varies on a continuum and is highly correlated to longevity to the position—early career, mid-career, and late career.

The Role of the Superintendent Alignment

Rural North Carolina Superintendents must understand their role not only in the school district but in the community at large. Superintendents' understanding of their role changes and deepens over time. The level of understanding affects the superintendents' own perceived professional development needs. The superintendent is a community leader who ensures the next generation of citizens and the future work force are ready to actively participate in the community and economy. Understanding the role

of the superintendency will assist the superintendent in choosing professional development that will enhance their performance.

- Finding: Rural North Carolina Superintendents direct and select their own professional development learning based on their individual needs and interests.
- Finding: Professional development needs in leading a complex organization varies and is highly correlated to longevity to the position—early-career, mid-career, and late-career.

Rural School District Challenges Alignment

In rural communities the superintendent's activities are more evident than in larger urban districts. The challenges that leading a rural school district pose regarding time out of the district, political and community pressures, visibility, etc. are determining factors when choosing to participate in professional development. Rural superintendents may be reticent to expend what they view as financial and political resources to attend professional development that requires significant financial resources and or significant time away from the district. This can become a barrier to obtaining the skills required to lead the school district which is a complex organization.

- Finding: The primary means of decision making for professional development participation is based on the availability of offerings, opportunities, and location.
- Finding: Rural North Carolina Superintendents face few barriers to professional development that are not self-imposed.

As evident in the research, the funnel was in continual ebb and flow as superintendents lead within the complex organization. Complexity Leadership Theory was the backdrop to which all moving parts were embedded, and Systems Thinking was the small opening at the bottom of the funnel that all the outputs went through before the perceived professional development needs could be identified. The output of the funnel was subject to the lived experiences (natural setting) of the superintendent participants on any given day with direct influence and perceptions (human behavior) based on the scope, size, direction, and sequence of the moving balls. Through the use of this conceptual framework as a lens to view the data, three themes and six findings as previously discussed emerged.

Additional to what the review of the literature indicated, I found that the end of the funnel trunk narrows in size with a shrinking diameter as the superintendent's longevity and experience increased—early-career, mid-career, and late-career. As a superintendent moves along the career continuum, he/she gains more knowledge of the role, the organization, and the education space, at which point the level of systems thinking matures directly impacting the superintendent's perceptions of his/her professional development needs. The perceived professional development needs in turn become narrower and with greater focus as the superintendent moves from early career to late career on the continuum leaving the exit aperture of the funnel narrower in diameter. Hence, a beginning superintendent with less maturity in systems thinking has a wide exit aperture with more perceived professional development needs in a broader range of topics, whereas a career superintendent with significant systems thinking maturity has a

much narrower aperture resulting in perceived professional development needs that are narrower in scope and sharply focused on individual goals and/or district initiatives.

Research Questions, Findings, and Themes

The research questions, findings, and themes listed below, described and supported in Chapter IV, are used to drive the recommendations and the development of a professional development blueprint for superintendents. The research question findings give insight into the professional development needs of rural North Carolina Superintendents.

1. What do practicing rural North Carolina superintendents perceive their professional development needs to be in leading a complex organization?

   Finding #1: To lead a complex organization, superintendents need professional development based on tactical and managerial topics. Leadership development in combination with mentoring and networking helps a superintendent lead a school district in an efficient and effective manner.

2. How do practicing rural North Carolina superintendents get their professional development needs met and how do they decide what to participate in for leadership growth?

   Finding #1: Rural North Carolina Superintendents direct and select their own professional development learning based on their individual needs and interests.

Finding #2: The primary means of decision making for professional development participation is based on availability of offerings, opportunities, and location.

Finding #3: Rural North Carolina Superintendents face few barriers to professional development that are not self-imposed.

3. Are there unique professional development needs for rural novice superintendents (less than 5 years of experience) compared to more experienced rural superintendents (greater than 5 years of experience)?

   Finding #1: Professional development needs in leading a complex organization varies on a continuum and is highly correlated to longevity in the position—early-career, mid-career, and late-career.

4. What types of professional development delivery best meet the needs of practicing rural superintendents and to what extent are their needs met or unmet?

   Finding #1: Rural North Carolina superintendents prefer an in-person delivery method for all forms of professional development with the exception of mentoring and or coaching for professional development which may be delivered via phone, video conference, and/or an in-person meeting on occasion.

      Sub-finding: Rural North Carolina superintendent participants (n=4) with more than seven years of experience in the superintendency are

open to virtual delivery for informational and tactical professional development.

From the findings, three themes emerged from the interviews from different perspectives, with different stories, yet interconnective with one another:

1. Mentorship is essential to growing and developing as a leader and was seen as critical to entering and surviving the superintendency.
2. Networking builds relationships which help expand knowledge and skills, provides an avenue to discuss vital aspects of a career path, allows the sharing of experiences and stories, and ultimately is paramount for success.
3. The superintendency is a multi-dimensional complex position that involves human-resource, political, and leadership expertise. Serving as a school principal, with an emphasis on the high school principalship, is vital for successful preparation to the superintendency and is an important learning experience for success as a superintendent.

Suggestions and Implications for Future Research

This study yielded several implications and suggestions for future research that were outside of the domain of my central research question that needs to be further explored. My sole focus throughout this process has been on the perceived professional development needs of rural NC superintendents. However, topics such as women and minority men mentoring and networking struggles became apparent upon examination of my data and therefore need further study. In multiple interviews, women and minority men superintendents expressed difficulty accessing the same high-quality mentoring and

networking opportunities of their White male counterparts. This lack of access to appropriate networking and mentoring therefore raised barriers to their ascension to the superintendency that were clearly found in my research findings as critical components. Barriers such as these limit diversity in the superintendency. Therefore, further research needs to be done in order to identify the specific barriers causing this problem and also finding solutions to remedy the issue that in turn will strengthen the position of the superintendent in all communities.

This study barely skimmed the surface with regard to virtual delivery of high-quality professional development, which in my opinion needs to be further studied and analyzed in order to meet the next generation of millennial superintendents. The rural superintendent participants of this study all expressed a preference for in-person professional development, mentoring, and networking, even though they were greatly concerned with time spent out of their district, combined with the negative perceptions of expense on participating in the professional development. Given the fact that our world is globally interconnected and driven in many ways by technology and social media, new methods of engaging superintendents in effective networking, coaching, and mentoring need to be researched. A clear understanding of what constitutes high-quality virtual professional development for superintendents also needs further study.

Recommendations

A rural superintendent is the face of the school district to both internal and external stakeholders. As a result, the superintendent must set expectations and a vision for the future of the district and show how the future will advance the goals of the

community. The rural superintendent must design and implement a plan to achieve these goals. The role of a rural superintendent, by its very nature, is complex. In this complex environment, it is essential that the superintendent continues to grow and develop in leadership. The current and future state of the rural superintendency will require increasing support, mentoring, and leadership development. Therefore, rural superintendents leading these rural fringe, rural distant, and rural remote districts experience unique challenges that must be met. Below are recommendations grounded in my research and findings for meeting these unique challenges through the lens of professional development. The recommendations are targeted directly to five specific audiences:

1. current rural superintendents,
2. state government officials,
3. university partners,
4. state and national organizations, and
5. corporate providers.

I have targeted each of the five groups due to the important supporting role they each can and should play in the professional growth of one of our most important community leaders—the superintendent. I have used this platform to speak directly to each audience with the strong desire of enhancing the professional growth and development of rural superintendents.

To Current Rural Superintendents

Current rural superintendents have a significant role to support not only their own professional development but the professional development of future superintendents. To that end, I propose the following recommendations in no particular order to current rural superintendents. I have structured the following paragraphs to speak directly to them as an audience.

Superintendent, you must be courageous and seek opportunities to continue to grow and develop through professional development, mentoring, coaching, and networking while also being open to virtual delivery models that provide quality professional development while allowing less time to be spent away from the district. It is essential that you invest time and resources in growing your own capacity to lead a large complex organization and set yourself up for long-term success by investing in yourself. It is important! Remember that you convey the culture of the school district. If district, principal, and teacher leaders see you investing in professional development and personal grow, then it will become part of the district culture—what we believe is important. In short, your example determines how others will lead, grow, and develop.

Superintendent, regularly and consistently communicate with all your constituents the need for continual learning so that the perception of time spent away from the district for professional development is viewed as an investment negating any undesirable perceptions. Remember that your actions are communicated stronger than your words. Therefore, you must demonstrate through actions that professional development participation is essential to leadership, growth, and development rather than as a privilege

or for the privileged. Your actions and strong communication are essential to permeate the district culture's perception of professional development.

Superintendent, be sure to negotiate your contract so that it addresses and supports your personal professional development with the time and resources needed. Also, provide the same contract opportunity to district and school level leaders under your charge as this will help ingrain professional development and continual learning as assets into the culture of the district. Advocating for the professional development time and resources for your direct reports is important to creating a culture of professional development ensuring strong leadership sustainability that outlasts any one sitting superintendent.

Superintendent, endeavor to embed diverse members of your school and district leadership into your professional network and teach them how to find mentors and network. The superintendency needs to be accessible to all that are qualified and desire to become a superintendent. We are counting on you to help grow the applicant pool to create a strong highly qualified diverse pipeline of future school leaders and superintendents.

Superintendent, be sure to understand your place and time on the leadership continuum regarding your professional development needs and be sure to monitor your growth. Utilize the professional development blueprint presented at the end of this chapter to aid in the creation of a written action plan to guide you on this journey. Finally, be humble in reciprocating lessons learned to new and future superintendents. The longer you serve as a superintendent the more experiences you can communicate.

New and future superintendents can learn from your experiences. Sharing your experiences with your mentees, networking groups, and peers will help you give back to the profession.

To State Government Officials and Policy Makers (i.e., State Departments)

State government and policymakers have a responsibility to support local superintendents with policy, regulation, legislation, and statewide leadership for public education. For superintendents to be successful and to implement the vision, policy, and legislation enacted by state government, professional development must be provided to local superintendents. For that reason, I propose the following recommendations in no precise order to state government officials and policy makers. I have structured the following paragraphs to speak directly to this audience.

State government officials and policymakers, it is essential that you provide informational and tactical professional development that supports topical issues such as curriculum (standard course of study changes, multi-lingual student support, etc.), new approaches to instructional delivery (personalized learning, flipped instruction, etc.), managerial (class size, use of funding sources, etc.), community interaction (gaining support for local bond referendum, explaining new sex education curriculum, etc.), finance (sound financial best practices understanding, capital improvement, and long-term financial planning), human resources (specifically recruiting and retention strategies), operations (facility maintenance, capital planning, transportation, etc.), policy, and federal and state legislative direction to superintendents.

Additionally, policy around superintendent professional development that enables and encourages full participation needs to be created, legislatively passed, and fully implemented. Policy should consist of a set of guidelines that frame appropriate professional development for superintendents. The policy should support a superintendent's growth in leadership, tactical, managerial, and informational professional development. A strong policy which enables the personal and professional growth of a superintendent will help enable a lifelong learning culture for superintendents, provide strong leadership for districts, and will ultimately impact student learning and achievement, creating stronger communities.

Geographical location, size, and/or funding should not be a barrier to meeting the professional development needs of superintendents. Therefore, it is essential that your position of power and authority be used to secure adequate funding for their full participation. The Superintendent Professional Development Blueprint outlined at the end of this chapter presents a continuum of professional development that should be both adopted and implemented.

To Higher Education Partners

Higher education is the pathway most superintendents take to obtain the coursework which enables licensure. Higher education is a place where educators can come together to share ideas and learn from each other and researchers in the field of education. With that goal, I propose the following recommendations in no specific order to Higher Education Partners. I have structured the following paragraphs to speak directly to this audience.

Higher Education Partners, your extensive knowledge of research, best practices, and access to scholar practitioners makes you the perfect resource to engage and assist in the creation and maintenance of a professional learning network (PLN) for superintendents. Professional learning networks (communities) are important ways to empower superintendents allowing immediate access to information as needed and/or desired. A PLN allows superintendents to reflect on their own processes and develop their skills. They can also receive insight from other superintendents as well as provide it. PLNs play to all superintendents' strengths and help them build their practices in new areas that may be lacking. Additional to PLNs, faculty in schools of education can share the latest research by hosting events that address "just-in-time" leadership topics based on research (i.e., best practices in teaching reading, using data, building culture, understanding equity, social justice leadership, etc.).

Higher Education Partners, we depend on you to be forward thinking on how to best meet the needs of our next generation leaders (i.e., Millennial Superintendents and beyond). This will require research to be conducted, published, and disseminated on how best to prepare them for the role of leading a complex organization in a new era—a new time and place in a global world.

Finally, superintendents will need virtual professional development delivery models to best support their learning needs and will need you to create and deliver the engaging virtual professional development. Your partnership is vital for superintendents to remain connected to the academic community in order to best support the communities they lead.

To State and National Associations (i.e., Superintendent Association, Regional Education Service Agency, etc.)

State and national associations provide the largest offerings of professional development beyond tactical/informational for superintendents. With that knowledge, I propose the following recommendations in no certain order to state and national associations. I have structured the following paragraphs to communicate directly to this audience.

To ensure that superintendents have the necessary skills to lead large complex organizations it is essential that you collaborate with state government officials to implement the Superintendent Professional Development Blueprint created from this research and summarized below. The blueprint aligns professional development opportunities to a superintendent's career stage: early-, mid-, and late-career, as identified in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Perceived Professional Development Continuum.

It is essential that you engage a team of diverse mentors which consists of respected, successful, seasoned superintendents to mentor early career superintendents both in-person and virtually. Likewise, engage a similar team for mid-career superintendents that can be accessed as needed for tactical questions and leadership growth areas. Finally, to support late career superintendents in their desire to give back to the profession and to help them grow in their own development, provide a mentoring and coaching training program that cycles them into the pool of diverse superintendents for early and mid-career superintendents.

As detailed in Chapter IV, networking is an important part of professional development for superintendents and potential superintendents. As a state and national organization, it is important that you provide networking opportunities for superintendents three to four times per year in a face-to-face setting and potential superintendents one to two times per year. Likewise, secure virtual communities should be established where superintendents and potential superintendents can network without having to leave their districts providing greater accessibility from rural geographic isolation. This will become more important as millennials who are digital natives filtrate the superintendency.

To Corporate Partners

Corporate partners can help provide professional development opportunities for superintendents with a vast array of offerings from leadership to topic specific. With that knowledge, I propose the following recommendations to corporate partners. I have structured the following paragraphs to communicate directly to this audience.

Corporate partners, superintendents need your voice to publicly advocate the need and expectation for their continued professional development participation in order to build leadership capacity within the educational organization with relevant stakeholders/ constituents. They also need you to step up and provide these opportunities when State Government Officials, University Partners, or State Associations are unable or unwilling to deliver this needed professional development as detailed in The Superintendent Professional Development Blueprint created from this research, and summarized below with the accompanying chart.

Last, state and national organizations will need your financial support and public advocacy voice to build, organize, and implement a national network for superintendent professional development, collaboration, mentoring, and networking. Superintendents are counting on your support to help change the cultural and societal norms around leadership professional development in schools, districts, and communities of today.

These recommendations are based on the perceptions of the professional development needs of the 12 rural NC superintendents who participated in this study. In giving these specific recommendations, it is my hope that their collective voices are heard and will serve as a catalyst of support to help alleviate rural superintendents concerns of longevity, tenure, turnover, and enjoyment of position. Communities depend on strong functioning schools with strong dedicated leaders to provide direction and vision that will enhance the overall success for students, the local economy, and the community at large. Simply put, “Leadership is at its heart a critical practice . . . (it) is oriented not just toward the development of more perfect organizational structures, but toward a

reconceptualization of life practices where common ideals of freedom and democracy stand important" (Foster, 1989, p. 52).

Superintendent Professional Development Blueprint

The Superintendent Professional Development Blueprint is a broad structural strategy intended to address the professional development needs of superintendents—early career, mid-career, and late-career. I have structured the blueprint using a tiering design since overlapping skills exist across the superintendent's longevity continuum. The blueprint is not meant to be all inclusive of specific topic recommendations or to serve as a professional development curriculum or set of training and support materials but rather to provide high-level categories needed at each tier. The tiering design recommends that the following organizations—State Government Officials and Policy Makers, Higher Education Partners, State and National Associations, and Corporate Partners form a nexus of support to provide professional development in each of the identified categories. This nexus of support coupled with commitment from the superintendent will strengthen the leadership capabilities of the superintendents and aid in capacity building in the districts they serve.

Figure 5 represents the blueprint and identifies the categories of needed professional development at each tier of development. The blueprint addresses the recommended supporting organizations which represent the nexus of support and articulates the commitments of the superintendent.

SUPERINTENDENT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT BLUEPRINT		
CAREER DEVELOPMENT CONTINUUM		
TIER 1	**TIER 2**	**TIER 3**
Tactical Professional Development	**Systems Leadership Professional Development**	**Mentorship and Innovative Implementation Professional Development**
• Managerial	• Leading Complex Organization	• Building Organizational Leadership Capacity
• Board Expectations	• Board Relationships	• Board Relationships
• Basics of the Role and Position	• Local, State, & National Policy	• Mentoring & Coaching District and School Leaders
• Informational	• Personal Leadership Development	• Tactical Professional Development that is topic specific
• Mentoring & Networking	• Topics for District Improvement	• Topics for district improvement
	• Mentoring & Networking	• Mentoring & Networking
NEXUS OF SUPPORT		
State Government Officials and Policy Makers ○ Create policy that enables and encourages superintendent professional development ○ Seek funding to support superintendent professional development ○ Adopt and implement the Blueprint for superintendent professional development		
Higher Education Partners ○ Engage and assist in the creation and maintenance of a professional learning network (PLN). ○ Host events that address "just-in-time" leadership topics based on research. ○ Conduct, publish, and disseminate research on virtual professional development delivery models to support the creation of engaging virtual professional development offerings.		

State and National Associations

- Collaborate with state government officials to implement the Blueprint for superintendent professional development.
- Provide professional development opportunities that are targeted to the career stage of superintendents.
- Engage a team of diverse mentors which consists of respected, successful, seasoned superintendents to mentor all early career superintendents both in-person and virtually.
- Engage a team of diverse mentors which consists of respected, successful, seasoned superintendents that mid-career superintendents can access for tactical questions and leadership growth areas of need on an as needed basis.
- Provide a training program for late career superintendents on mentoring and coaching that can participate in a pool of diverse superintendents for early and mid-career superintendents.

State and National Associations (cont.)

- Provide networking opportunities for superintendents 3 to 4 times per year in person.
- Provide networking opportunities for aspiring superintendents 1 to 2 times per year in person.
- Develop secure virtual communities where superintendents and aspiring superintendents can network.

Corporate Partners

- Provide professional development opportunities when State Government Officials, University Partners, or State Associations are unable or unwilling to deliver needed professional development based on the Superintendent Professional Development Blueprint created from this research and summarized below with an accompanying chart.
- Publicly advocate the need for continued professional development for superintendents and the building of leadership capacity within the educational organization with relevant stakeholders / constituents.
- Organize and support a national network for superintendent professional development, collaboration, mentoring, and networking.

SUPERINTENDENT COMMITMENTS

- Be courageous, seek opportunities to continue to grow and develop through professional development, mentoring, coaching, and networking. Be open to virtual delivery models that provide quality professional development while allowing less time to be spent away from the district.
- Invest time and resources in growing capacity to lead a large complex organization.
- Communicate regularly with all constituents the need for continual learning so that time spent away from the district is viewed as an investment instead of as a negative perception.
- Negotiate contract that has a focus on personal professional development with the time and resources needed. Additionally, provide the same opportunity to district and school level leaders as this will help ingrain professional development and continual learning as assets into the culture of the district.
- Invest in building leadership capacity within the school district that results in a cultural shift to ensure strong leadership sustainability that outlasts any one sitting superintendent. Endeavor to embed diverse members of school and district leadership into network.
- Understand place and time on the leadership continuum regarding professional development needs and monitor growth to ensure success.
- Be humble in reciprocating lessons learned to new and future superintendents.

Figure 5. Superintendent Professional Development Blueprint.

Closing Thoughts

The entire research experience, especially the interviews with the superintendent participants, crystalized my view that superintendents are critical to a local community's prosperity. It is through the deployment of a superintendent's expertise and leadership that new innovative ideas reach the public sector and thereby turn the school district into an economic engine that drives the realization of the American dream.

I have spent the last 20 years of my career in the private business sector where professional development was viewed as an investment in human capital. In my research, it was startling at times to uncover a culture that viewed professional

development as a privilege instead of a necessity for leadership growth, especially given the fact that learning is the primary mission of a school district. This fact left me wondering if we really believe that learning is the central mission for all in schools and all school districts. Lou Gerstner, former Chairman of IBM, expressed best my view of professional development when he stated, "people pay us for what we know. If we cease to know they will cease to pay." If the leader of a large complex organization ceases to learn, grow, and evolve as a leader, then support for the school district will diminish, causing a lack of confidence both internally and externally. This lack of confidence will cause the district growth to decline, which will result in poor performance of the school district, which in turn has economic and societal implications. This lack of confidence leaves the school district as a liability to the community instead of as a driver to community progress. In short, failure in leadership can result in a diminished investment in schools.

The blueprint for superintendent professional development I have presented could transform the culture of the educational community from one in which professional development is constrained and scrutinized, to one where professional development is viewed as a necessary investment that enables growth and high performance. I believe the educational community needs to develop leaders who are humble, kind, and supportive of one another. Superintendents need to reach down into the organization and support the next generation of leaders.

A school district can be an economic engine for the community. The graduation of students with the skills needed to propel the community forward in the right direction

is important. To enable schools to produce the types of graduates who can successfully participate in the social, economic, and political fabric of the community where they live, school districts must be led by strong leaders who are steeped in the necessary skills to run a complex organization. The Superintendent Professional Development Framework created from this research should give superintendents a roadmap and support structure to excel. Failure to enable superintendents with the necessary skills to lead appropriately only dooms our communities to broken promises and missed social, political, and economic opportunities. Through the implementation of the Superintendent Professional Development Framework and the recommendations above, our schools and districts can excel in the same ways that our great companies excel. The students they produce can compete with any student from anywhere in the world.

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APPENDIX A

PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERS (2015)
NATIONAL POLICY BOARD FOR EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

1. Mission, Vision, and Core Values - Effective educational leaders develop, advocate, and enact a shared mission, vision, and core values of high-quality education and academic success and well-being of each student.
2. Ethics and Professional Norms - Effective educational leaders act ethically and according to professional norms to promote each student's academic success and well-being.
3. Equity and Cultural Responsiveness - Effective educational leaders strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote each student's academic success and well-being.
4. Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment - Effective educational leaders develop and support intellectually rigorous and coherent systems of curriculum instruction, and assessment to promote each student's academic success and well-being.
5. Community of Care and Support for Students - Effective educational leaders cultivate an inclusive, caring, and supportive school community that promotes the academic success and well-being of each student.
6. Professional Capacity of School Personnel - Effective educational leaders develop the professional capacity and practice of school personnel to promote each student's academic success and well-being.
7. Professional Community for Teachers and Staff - Effective educational leaders foster a professional community of teachers and other professional staff to promote each student's academic success and well-being.
8. Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community - Effective educational leaders engage families and the community in meaningful, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial ways to promote each student's academic success and well-being.
9. Operations and Management - Effective educational leaders manage school operations and resources to promote each student's academic success and well-being.
10. School Improvement - Effective educational leaders act as agents of continuous improvement to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

APPENDIX B

NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS
CCD PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT DATA FOR 2015-2016 SCHOOL YEARS

NCES District ID	District Name	County Name*	City	Student #	Teachers #	School #	Locale
3700030	Alamance-Burlington Schools	ALAMANCE COUNTY	Burlington	23040	1486.61	36	Rural: Fringe
3700090	Alexander County Schools	ALEXANDER COUNTY	Whitmansville	5257	324.57	10	Rural: Fringe
3700120	Alleghany County Schools	ALLEGHANY COUNTY	Sparta	1477	118.23	4	Rural: Remote
3700180	Anson County Schools	ANSON COUNTY	Wadesboro	3526	227.27	11	Rural: Distant
3700210	Ashe County Schools	ASHE COUNTY	Jefferson	3240	239.5	5	Rural: Fringe
3700300	Avery County Schools	AVERY COUNTY	Newland	2195	173.04	11	Rural: Distant
3700330	Beaufort County Schools	BEAUFORT COUNTY	Washington	7182	499.87	14	Rural: Fringe
3700360	Bertie County Schools	BERTIE COUNTY	Windsor	2546	175.8	9	Rural: Distant
3700390	Bladen County Schools	BLADEN COUNTY	Elizabethtown	4925	317.45	13	Rural: Distant
3700420	Brunswick County Schools	BRUNSWICK COUNTY	Bolivia	12534	797.76	19	Rural: Fringe
3700480	Burke County Schools	BURKE COUNTY	Morganton	12984	820.03	27	Rural: Fringe
3700600	Camden County Schools	CAMDEN COUNTY	Camden	1944	125.89	5	Rural: Fringe
3700630	Carteret County Public Schools	CARTERET COUNTY	Beaufort	8524	635.59	17	Rural: Fringe

NCES District ID	District Name	County Name*	City	Student #	Teachers #	School #	Locale
3700660	Caswell County Schools	CASWELL COUNTY	Yanceyville	2817	189.93	6	Rural: Distant
3700690	Catawba County Schools	CATAWBA COUNTY	Newton	16879	1075.16	28	Rural: Fringe
3700750	Chatham County Schools	CHATHAM COUNTY	Pittsboro	8616	583.27	17	Rural: Fringe
3700780	Cherokee County Schools	CHEROKEE COUNTY	Murphy	3423	245.34	14	Rural: Remote
3700870	Clay County Schools	CLAY COUNTY	Hayesville	1362	98.31	3	Rural: Remote
3700930	Clinton City Schools	SAMPSON COUNTY	Clinton	3176	200.69	5	Rural: Fringe
3700900	Cleveland County Schools	CLEVELAND COUNTY	Shelby	15492	1049.14	29	Town: Fringe
3700960	Columbus County Schools	COLUMBUS COUNTY	Whiteville	6297	402.74	18	Rural: Distant
3703310	Craven County Schools	CRAVEN COUNTY	New Bern	14517	951.37	25	Rural: Fringe
3701080	Currituck County Schools	CURRITUCK COUNTY	Currituck	3918	250.34	10	Rural: Distant
3701140	Davidson County Schools	DAVIDSON COUNTY	Lexington	19854	1194.05	35	Rural: Fringe
3701170	Davie County Schools	DAVIE COUNTY	Mocksville	6338	437.9	12	Rural: Fringe
3701200	Duplin County Schools	DUPLIN COUNTY	Kenansville	10133	629.63	16	Rural: Distant
3700840	Edenton-Chowan Schools	CHOWAN COUNTY	Edenton	2263	154.93	4	Rural: Distant
3701320	Edgecombe County Public Schools	EDGECOMBE COUNTY	Tarboro	6016	396.32	16	Rural: Distant

NCES District ID	District Name	County Name*	City	Student #	Teachers #	School #	Locale
3703540	Elizabeth City-Pasquotank Public Schools	PASQUOTANK COUNTY	Elizabeth City	5936	386.21	12	Rural: Fringe
3701530	Franklin County Schools	FRANKLIN COUNTY	Louisburg	8711	577.68	16	Rural: Fringe
3701680	Gates County Schools	GATES COUNTY	Gatesville	1691	136.54	5	Rural: Distant
3701770	Graham County Schools	GRAHAM COUNTY	Robbinsville	1236	87.79	3	Rural: Remote
3701800	Granville County Schools	GRANVILLE COUNTY	Oxford	8214	480.62	21	Rural: Fringe
3701830	Greene County Schools	GREENE COUNTY	Snow Hill	3181	218.18	6	Rural: Distant
3701950	Halifax County Schools	HALIFAX COUNTY	Halifax	3121	222.8	11	Rural: Distant
3702010	Harnett County Schools	HARNETT COUNTY	Lillington	20506	1260.96	28	Rural: Fringe
3702280	Hyde County Schools	HYDE COUNTY	Swan Quarter	609	58.81	3	Rural: Remote
3702340	Jackson County Public Schools	JACKSON COUNTY	Sylva	3712	249.98	9	Rural: Fringe
3702370	Johnston County Schools	JOHNSTON COUNTY	Smithfield	34551	2252.6	44	Rural: Fringe
3702400	Jones County Schools	JONES COUNTY	Trenton	1211	90.7	6	Rural: Distant
3702560	Lee County Schools	LEE COUNTY	Sanford	10253	632.27	16	Rural: Fringe
3702610	Lenoir County Schools	LENOIR COUNTY	Kinston	9274	590.82	17	Rural: Fringe
3702680	Lincoln County Schools	LINCOLN COUNTY	Lincolnton	11755	780.11	24	Rural: Fringe

NCES District ID	District Name	County Name*	City	Student #	Teachers #	School #	Locale
3702760	Macon County Schools	MACON COUNTY	Franklin	4440	313.76	11	Rural: Fringe
3702820	Madison County Schools	MADISON COUNTY	Marshall	2489	180.69	7	Rural: Distant
3702880	Martin County Schools	MARTIN COUNTY	Williamston	3441	260.56	11	Rural: Distant
3702940	McDowell County Schools	MCDOWELL COUNTY	Marion	6338	438.98	13	Rural: Fringe
3703000	Mitchell County Schools	MITCHELL COUNTY	Bakersville	1954	144.04	7	Rural: Distant
3703060	Montgomery County Schools	MONTGOMERY COUNTY	Troy	4194	273.47	11	Rural: Fringe
3703090	Moore County Schools	MOORE COUNTY	Carthage	13003	811.71	23	Rural: Distant
3703270	Nash-Rocky Mount Schools	NASH COUNTY	Nashville	16151	923.68	29	Rural: Fringe
3703420	Northampton County Schools	NORTHAMPTON COUNTY	Jackson	2110	148.58	8	Rural: Distant
3703510	Pamlico County Schools	PAMLICO COUNTY	Bayboro	1306	102.49	4	Rural: Distant
3703570	Pender County Schools	PENDER COUNTY	Burgaw	9085	553.95	16	Rural: Fringe
3703600	Perquimans County Schools	PERQUIMANS COUNTY	Hertford	1762	127.88	4	Rural: Distant
3703630	Person County Schools	PERSON COUNTY	Roxboro	4671	309.79	10	Rural: Distant
3703720	Polk County Schools	POLK COUNTY	Columbus	2380	188.87	7	Rural: Distant
3703780	Randolph County School System	RANDOLPH COUNTY	Asheboro	18078	1138.49	31	Rural: Fringe

NCES District ID	District Name	County Name*	City	Student #	Teachers #	School #	Locale
3703990	Rockingham County Schools	ROCKINGHAM COUNTY	Eden	13141	827.74	25	Rural: Fringe
3704050	Rowan-Salisbury Schools	ROWAN COUNTY	Salisbury	20111	1282.43	35	Rural: Fringe
3704080	Rutherford County Schools	RUTHERFORD COUNTY	Forest City	8604	552.11	18	Rural: Fringe
3704140	Sampson County Schools	SAMPSON COUNTY	Clinton	8763	564.71	18	Rural: Distant
3704320	Stanly County Schools	STANLY COUNTY	Albemarle	8693	610.55	21	Rural: Distant
3704380	Stokes County Schools	STOKES COUNTY	Danbury	6563	460.45	20	Rural: Fringe
3704410	Surry County Schools	SURRY COUNTY	Dobson	8452	538.69	19	Rural: Distant
3704440	Swain County Schools	SWAIN COUNTY	Bryson City	2100	141.08	5	Rural: Distant
3704590	Tyrrell County Schools	TYRRELL COUNTY	Columbia	594	49.5	3	Rural: Remote
3704740	Warren County Schools	WARREN COUNTY	Warrenton	2463	159.25	8	Rural: Remote
3704800	Washington County Schools	WASHINGTON COUNTY	Plymouth	1688	111	5	Rural: Fringe
3704830	Watauga County Schools	WATAUGA COUNTY	Boone	4406	354.76	10	Rural: Distant
3704880	Wayne County Schools	WAYNE COUNTY	Goldsboro	19249	1234.94	33	Rural: Fringe
3704950	Wilkes County Schools	WILKES COUNTY	North Wilkesboro	10268	642.9	22	Rural: Fringe
3705020	Wilson County Schools	WILSON COUNTY	Wilson	12386	741.46	25	Rural: Distant

NCES District ID	District Name	County Name*	City	Student #	Teachers #	School #	Locale
3705040	Yadkin County Schools	YADKIN COUNTY	Yadkinville	5642	374.12	14	Rural: Distant
3705070	Yancey County Schools	YANCEY COUNTY	Burnsville	2235	169.1	9	Rural: Distant

APPENDIX C

STANDARDS FOR DELINEATING METROPOLITAN AND MICROPOLITAN STATISTICAL AREAS

Locale	Definition
City	
Large	Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with a population of 250,000 or more
Midsize	Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with a population less than 250,000 and greater than or equal to 100,000
Small	Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with a population less than 100,000
Suburb	
Large	Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with a population of 250,000 or more
Midsize	Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with a population less than 250,000 and greater than or equal to 100,000
Small	Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with a population less than 100,000
Town	
Fringe	Territory inside an urban cluster that is less than or equal to 10 miles from an urbanized area
Distant	Territory inside an urban cluster that is more than 10 miles and less than or equal to 35 miles from an urbanized area
Remote	Territory inside an urban cluster that is more than 35 miles from an urbanized area
Rural	
Fringe	Census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster
Distant	Census-defined rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an urban cluster
Remote	Census-defined rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an urbanized area and is also more than 10 miles from an urban cluster

APPENDIX D

SUPERINTENDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Tell me a little about yourself, your background, professional experiences and other opportunities as it relates to your journey to the superintendency.
2. How long have you served as a Superintendent?
3. How long have you served as a Rural Superintendent? In this district?
4. Tell me about your experience as a Superintendent.
5. How would you describe your role as a Superintendent?
6. How would you describe your role as a Rural Superintendent?
7. What is expected of you as a Rural Superintendent?
8. What preparation did you receive in order to be a Superintendent?
9. What if any professional organizations do you belong?
10. What professional development opportunities exist for Superintendents? Nationally? Statewide? Regionally?
11. How do you define professional development?
12. How would you describe effective professional development?
13. What professional development have you participated in since becoming a Superintendent? What did you hope to gain from participation?
14. What professional development opportunities do you feel are needed to support you as Superintendent? Rural Superintendent?
15. What incentives and/or barriers exist in a Superintendent attending professional development opportunities?

16. What networking opportunities exist for Superintendents? How do you participate? How would you evaluate these opportunities?
17. What delivery model(s) of professional development best meets the needs of Superintendents?
18. What key factors or elements do you consider before participating in professional development?
19. How if any does professional development needs change during the Superintendency?
20. What if any questions did I not ask for which you would be willing or desire to share your input and perspective?