LEADERSHIP PRACTICES OF SELECTED TEXAS PUBLIC SCHOOL

SUPERINTENDENTS PURSUING THEIR DISTRICT'S VISION

AND MISSION IN AN ENVIRONMENT OF

HIGH-STAKES TESTING

by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my father, the late Dr. James F. Smith. Dad, in your dissertation, you personally thanked me for my "inspirational attitude" (Smith, 1982, p. vi) that helped contribute to the completion of your study. I am so honored to have you as the inspiration for my study.

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ABSTRACT

Since the early 1980s, the push for school and district accountability has been the

driving force behind the increase in standardized testing in Texas public schools.

Accountability is now conjoined with test results, often pitting the evaluation of a school

district against its own vision, mission, and goals. The results of these high stakes tests

can have significant consequences for students, families, teachers, administrators, and the

community.

Leadership plays a vital role in managing the demands of the state's reliance on

high-stakes testing for accountability while pursuing the district's mission and vision of

the community the leader serves. At the helm of school leadership is the superintendent

of schools whose job has become increasingly complex, in an environment that has

become more convoluted and antagonistic. This qualitative research study explores the

leadership practices that Texas public-school superintendents perceive they utilize to

influence their organization's culture toward the attainment of their district's mission and

vision in an educational environment defined by high-stakes testing. In this multiple case

study, three district superintendents were interviewed to explore the leadership practices

they pursue to support the district's mission, vision, and goals with (a) central office

administrators, (b) campus administrators, and (c) school board members. In addition,

three district stakeholders were interviewed to investigate their perceptions of these

superintendents' leadership practices. Data from these interviews were coded and

analyzed, documents were collected, and findings reported with conclusions drawn about

the practices discovered. This study hopes to provide current and aspiring superintendents, as well as scholarly researchers, a deeper understanding of the superintendent's leadership in managing the pursuit of their district's mission and vision while negotiating the high-stakes testing environment.

I. INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

During my educational career, I have witnessed the full spectrum of emotions on the faces of students, parents, and those who serve them in schools. I have seen the face of a student-athlete who had just won a state championship for his school and city. I have watched the moment when a first-year teacher fully realized and understood her calling to educate and lead students, despite dealing with challenges throughout the school year. I have sat with a student in despair after informing her that her best friend took his own life, and I have cried with a teacher who had just been given the news that he had cancer. The emotions that manifest and the life-altering scenarios that take place inside a school's walls are far from predictable. However, one emotion that I have seen repeatedly, and can almost guarantee will occur each year, is the anxiety that standardized testing causes in students and staff. I have witnessed students become physically ill when test day arrives due to their fear of the examinations and have seen teachers who are so anxious about the performance of their students that they must take mental health days to recuperate. As a campus principal, I have had to personally call a mother and inform her, despite meeting all graduation requirements set forth by our school district, her daughter would not be able to graduate because the young woman had failed a state-mandated standardized test. In my role leading school principals, I have watched our campus administrators nervously count down the days to the release of the Texas Education Agency (TEA) school accountability ratings. The apprehension and dread related to testing have personally impacted me as well. In a conversation with my second-grade son near the end of his school year, he informed me that he did not want to continue to

third grade. When I asked him why, he explained to me that it was because he would

have to take the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) Exam.

Background

The ways in which testing has impacted our schools are astounding. Many

educators in public schools are consumed with accountability scores instead of focusing

on whether the learning needs of students are being met in the classroom (Kohn, 2000).

As a Texas public school superintendent, I believe that test scores serve as an important

metric of student achievement. However, high-stakes exams should not define who our

students, staff, schools, and communities are. We are more than a number or letter grade.

While testing has its place in the assessment of learning, it should not be the basis of all

teaching and educational decisions of a school district. Even so, Texas state legislators

have historically adopted an accountability system that measures student achievement

and a school district's overall educational performance primarily on the results of

students' standardized test scores (Heilig & Darlin-Hammond, 2008). This test-based

accountability system has significantly influenced schooling in Texas. From master

scheduling to curriculum implementation, from job security to campus closures, this

testing environment has had a profound impact on most Texas public school districts

(Haladyna, 2006).

The high-stakes testing movement has created such a significant organizational

cultural shift within public education that testing "has become part of the very social

fabric that comprises our current cultural blanket" (Moses & Nanna, 2007, p. 63). Kohn

(2000) described this cultural shift best, stating, "Standardized testing has swelled and

mutated, like a creature in one of those old horror movies, to the point that it now

threatens to swallow our schools whole" (p. 1). Eckstein and Noah (1993), for example, found a student's entire learning and career trajectory is often determined by a single test. As Froese-German (2001) explained, the influence that high-stakes testing has on public-education has become so substantial that testing and accountability are synonymous with one another.

The emphasis placed on test-based accountability has become so distorted that district priorities and goals, as well as personnel and purchasing decisions, are often contingent on the results of a multiple-choice test, given on one day out of the whole school year. In fact, high-stakes testing can be considered an external organizational factor that affects school districts in profound ways, potentially displacing the aims and goals of school districts' core vision and mission to such a significant degree that administrative decisions are made based solely on improving test scores (Bohte & Meier, 2000).

The leader ultimately responsible for these decisions is the superintendent of schools; his or her guidance is paramount to overall school effectiveness (Marzano, Walter, & McNulty, 2005). As Keane and Moore (2001) bluntly explained, "The superintendent of schools plays a significant role in determining the educational fate of a school district" (p. 3). The way in which a school's superintendent responds to this environment of high-stakes testing will significantly influence the district's organizational culture.

Statement of the Problem

Numerous studies and publications depict the negative impact high stakes testing has on a school district (Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Booher-Jennings, 2005; Haney, 2000;

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Jones & Hargrove, 2003; McNeil, 2000; McNeil & Valenzuela, 2001; Nichols, Glass, & Berliner, 2005; Siegel, 2004). Even so, public schools continue to focus on reform efforts in an all-out attempt to increase test scores and improving state accountability measures (Hursh, 2008; Payne, 2008). The result is that districts often prioritize strategies that favor improving test scores in lieu of the core vision and mission of the district, which are often intangible. This tendency for some organizations to concentrate on activities and programs that yield tangible results rather than more difficult to measure intangible organizational goals is referred to as goal displacement (Warner & Havens, 1968). Rather than measuring final outcomes, such as life-long learning, maximizing potential, or engaged citizenship, school districts often pay more attention to outputs such as test scores, that are easier to quantify and measure (Bohte & Meier, 2000). Superintendents are thus placed in the unenviable position of pursuing both official and operative goals (Scott, 1967)—the mission of the district and high test scores. Extant research into how superintendents balance these often-discrepant obligations is meager. As a result, superintendents attempting to negotiate this challenging situation have minimal information or research to guide them.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study was to discover and identify the perceived leadership practices exhibited by Texas public-school superintendents who are pursuing the vision and mission of their school district while simultaneously responding to the external demands of high-stakes testing. Data from this research identified which leadership practices superintendents perceived they employed with district administrators, campus administrators, and school board members as well as how

these stakeholders perceived the superintendent's leadership practices. Throughout this study, I examined these leadership practices and perceptions across three school districts in order to see what particular trends and patterns emerged and how they were connected with Schein's (2010) conceptualization of organizational culture. It is important to note that the purpose of this study was to explore the perceived leadership practices of selected superintendents, not to assess or make a judgment about the quality or efficacy of those practices.

Research Questions

This study examined how superintendents work at different levels of the organization in order to navigate the high-stakes testing environment while pursuing their district's mission and vision. The following questions were explored in this study:

Q1:   What perceived leadership practices does a superintendent engage in to pursue the district's mission and vision in an environment of high-stakes testing with

- central office administrators;

- campus administrators; and

- school board members?

Q2:   How are the leadership practices of the superintendent, in relation to the districts' mission and vision in an environment of high-stakes testing, perceived by

- central office administrators;

- campus administrators; and

- school board members?

Significance of the Study

Many superintendents across Texas report struggling to respond to the policies, mandates, and demands of high-stakes testing and accountability (Ayala & Hobbs, 2016). Numerous superintendents disagree about prioritizing the importance of state-mandated exams (Texas Association of School Administrators, 2008). Although superintendents concur that learning should be assessed, and schools should be accountable for student performance, most administrators value multiple measurements of assessment over a single test (Texas Association of School Administrators, 2008). However, today's school district leaders in Texas are faced with a situation in which students, teachers, principals, superintendents, and entire communities are judged on the basis of standardized test scores. Some school leaders describe feeling forced to abandon their district's overarching mission and goals in favor of a single measure of district success; high scores on state-mandated standardized tests. As a result, schools are experiencing the unintended consequences of goal displacement (Bohte & Meir, 2000). By collecting, analyzing, and sharing the information discovered from this study, my intention is that superintendents, and other educational and community leaders, will have some practical and evidence-based examples of how to navigate the demands of high-stakes testing and state accountability while pursuing their district's vision, mission, and goals. In addition, my hope is that this research will fill a gap in the literature, encouraging more research and conversation about the relationship between high stakes testing and the purpose of schools.

Conceptual Framework

The lens through which this study was viewed is Edgar Schein's dynamic model of organizational culture. In his model, Schein (2010) described the importance culture plays in shaping an organization's identity. He noted, culture is "one of the most powerful and stable forces operating in organizations" (Schein, 1996, p. 231). He also found that culture "influences all aspects of how an organization deals with its primary task, its various environments, and its internal operations" (Schein, 2010, p. 17). Through his research, Schein (2010) found that leadership plays a significant role in an organization's culture. Specifically, he explained the influence of leadership is a determining factor regarding how an organization's culture is developed, passed on, influenced, and changed. As leaders model certain behaviors, the behaviors of groups in the organization follow, ultimately driving the organization's culture (Schein, 2010). Schein's (2010) theory identified specific, mechanisms leaders employ that influence an organization's culture. The six primary embedding mechanisms are "the most powerful daily behavioral things that leaders do" (Schein, 2010, p. 235). According to Schein (2010), the major tools that leaders use to transmit and influence an organization's culture include (a) what they attend to, measure, and control, (b) how they model, teach, and coach, and (c) how they distribute rewards and status. A complete list of all six mechanisms can be found in Appendix A and will be discussed in greater detail in the literature review. In this study, I examined how superintendents navigate the high-stakes testing environment while pursuing their district's mission and vision through the lens of Schein's model of leadership and organizational culture.

Overview of Methodology

The topic and research questions guided me to conduct a qualitative study. Corbin and Strauss (2008) identified that qualitative research "allows researchers to get at the inner experience of participants, to determine how meanings are formed through and in culture, and to discover rather than test variables" (p. 12). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) noted that the essence of qualitative research is not about an amount or quantity; instead, it considers how something is shaped and created and how it gains meaning. In this study, I interviewed three Texas public school superintendents to uncover the practices they utilize in their leadership. Additionally, I explored how stakeholders within the superintendent's district perceive their leadership practices.

A multiple case study was conducted of three different superintendents in three different districts. Participants were selected from the 1,247 school districts across the state of Texas via an expert panel. The expert panel consisted of school leaders and university professors formed with the purpose of nominating superintendent participants according to specified criteria. Three additional participants were selected by each nominated superintendent. These participants came from within the superintendent's district and will include one central office administrator, one campus administrators, and a school board member. Each participant was interviewed using a semi-structured approach. Documents, such as district mission and vision statement and district strategic plan were collected and analyzed to provide context to the interview on how the superintendent navigates in this high-stakes testing environment. The interviews were transcribed and coded, and all data were analyzed through the lens of Schein's model of leadership and organizational culture. Findings are reported, and conclusions have been drawn in chapters four and five.

Definition of Relevant Terms

- **Community-Based Accountability System.** A system that repositions the accountability of a school district from the state to the community that the district serves (Tanner, 2016).

- **Goal Displacement.** "When agency agencies focus on generating numbers that please political officials, rather than devoting their energies to achieving more meaningful policy outcomes" (Bohte & Meier, 2000, p. 174).

- **High-Stakes Tests**. "Tests whose scores have a direct impact on a person's life options and opportunities" (Moses & Nanna, 2007, p. 56).

- **Leadership.** "Influencing and facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives" (Yukl, 2012, p. 66).

- **Mission.** A declaration of an organization's reason for being (Cochran, David, & Gibson, 2008).

- **Organizational Culture.** A pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems" (Schein, 2010, p. 18).

- **Policy Monitoring.** A type of goal displacement in which specific outputs and outcomes of bureaucratic organizations can be tracked, by policymakers, so that the organization's performance and continuity in practices are ensured (Pratt & Zeckhauser, 1985; Walker, 2009).

- **Strategic Plan.** A plan that improves educational outcomes by focusing on a small set of highly important issues developed through a collaborative design effort (National Research Council, 1999).

- **Vision.** An organization's desired, long-term future state (Burns, 1978).

Limitations of the Study

A limitation of this study is the sample size of participants as compared to the total number of superintendents across the state. With many case studies, research discovered may limit the amount of confidence found in generalizations (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This study only captured the experiences of three of the over one thousand superintendents across the state. An additional limitation is the lack of research surrounding the topic. Much of the literature regarding school leadership is that of the principalship. Not only is there limited research on the leadership of superintendents in general, but there is even more limited, if any, research on how school superintendents pursue their districts' mission and vision nor how they respond to the high-stakes testing environment.

A final limitation of this study is my strong personal and professional belief that student performance and school accountability should not be defined solely on the results of high-stakes testing. Albeit, there are superintendents in the state of Texas who focus a great deal of their attention and resources primarily on the state's accountability system. This study did not focus on their practices. Knowing and recognizing that I have these biases, I feel as if I have reported the findings and conclusions of this study factually and accurately. To the best of my ability, I reported and presented the leadership practices and perceptions identified in this study with minimal interference from my own biases.

Summary

As school superintendents are charged with the daunting task of leading organizations towards their district's mission and vision, the leadership decisions they make and actions they take are paramount. To add to this challenge, an environment of high stakes testing continues to flourish in our schools and influence district cultures. How the superintendent manages this pervasive testing environment while simultaneously directing the district towards its mission and vision is a task every superintendent in Texas faces. Notwithstanding the amount of literature that showcases practices of leadership in general, there is very minimal literature focusing on the leadership practices of the superintendent. This dissertation aimed at discovering the specific leadership practices superintendents employ that both guides the district towards its mission and vision while successfully managing the demands of the testing environment.

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is to conduct a thorough review of the literature that is relevant to the practices superintendents employ to pursue their district's vision, mission, and goals in an educational environment of high-stakes testing. The way in which superintendents lead and the practices they use have a significant impact on the overall direction of a district and affect the district's organizational culture. In this review of the literature, I will focus on four primary topics. Firstly, the study will discuss the superintendency, what the research says regarding the role, the role's evolution, and its impact on education. Secondly, the study will address the testing environment, its development, and its impact on public schools. Thirdly, the study will examine how goal displacement has interrupted the direction of public schools and influenced superintendent leadership. Finally, the study will explain the conceptual framework of organizational culture and how it was used as a lens through which to view this study.

Superintendency

Leadership has guided public schools in the United States since the early 20th century (Goodwin, Cameron, & Hein, 2015). At the helm of that leadership is the superintendent of schools, who acts as the chief executive officer of the school district (Hoyle et al., 2005). As 50.7 million students enter more than 100,000 public schools every day and with over $668 billion invested into their education (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2014; 2018), the superintendency is a job of immense importance and responsibility. Hodgkinson and Montenegro (1999) attested to the need for high-quality superintendents and their ability to lead, stating:

In virtually every city and county in the nation, education is the largest item in the local budget. For these and other reasons, we need the most highly qualified and skilled people in the superintendency to confront the host of urgent problems besieging American education. (p. 9)

In fact, U.S. Education Secretary, Rod Paige (2001), once proclaimed, "there is no more important job than that of leading effective public schools" (p. 26).

The role is a difficult and complex assignment (Houston, 2001; Kowalski, 2006), and researchers have heralded the superintendency as one of the most challenging jobs in America (Carr, 2003; Chapman, 1997; Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999; Kowalski, 1995). As the leader of a school district, the superintendent is charged with an array of responsibilities, including guiding the district toward a shared vision of exemplary performance, driving the district toward the progression and attainment of district goals, serving as the district's primary instructional leader, and modeling inspired leadership (Black, 2007; ECRA Group, 2010; Fullan, 2004). DiPaola and Stronge (2003) commented that the superintendent of schools epitomizes the aspirations and responsibilities of the district he or she leads.

However, the tasks of the superintendent do not stop at the job description. It is a high-profile position that attracts public attention throughout the community in which superintendents serve. Cunningham and Cordeiro (2006) explained, "The superintendent has become the most visible, most vulnerable, and potentially most influential member of the organization" (p. 126). In the midst of performing their assigned duties, superintendents often find themselves in conflicting and combative situations with elected officials, special interest groups, and even school board members (Kowalski,

2006). These external pressures and situations often occur in the public arena and are looked upon with extensive criticism (Harris, Lowery, Hopson & Marshall, 2004). Brown, Swenson, and Hertz (2007) elaborated, saying:

> In a climate of high expectations and blame placing, superintendents are expected to be all things to all populations. From adept politicians to visionaries, superintendents are asked to quell the confusion of the here-and-now, while focusing on a future vision of sweeping success for all. (p.5)

Increased pressures related to state accountability standards and the daunting task of reforming education add to the considerable pressures of the job (Rueter, 2009). Simply put, superintendents are "being called upon to take up the challenge of totally rethinking and fundamentally improving American education" (Carter & Cunningham, 1997, p. 2442).

Despite the seemingly insurmountable job of the superintendency, it is one that makes a difference. "Superintendents know they can change the trajectory of children's lives, alter the behavior of organizations, and expand the possibilities of whole communities" (Houston, 2001, p. 429). Their leadership matters. In fact, when looking at the impact of the superintendency in terms of school district performance, multiple researchers, including Leithwood (1994); McFarlane (2010); Marzano, Walters, and McNulty (2005); and, Waters and Marzano (2006) found that these administrators have a profound and positive impact. For example, Waters and Marzano (2006) found the correlation between superintendent leadership and student achievement to be .24 with a 95% confidence interval. Though some researchers may conclude differently, the leadership of the superintendent is undoubtedly a difference-maker in the success or

failure of our school districts (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Fullan, 2016; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Yukl, 2010).

Evolution of the Superintendency

An evolution of the job and responsibilities regarding the superintendency has taken place over the course of the position's historical timeline (Fuchs, 2006; Kowalski, 2005). The need for the position of superintendent of schools developed in the 1800s due to the changing contexts of public education in the U.S., including urbanization, the consolidation of rural schools, expanding state curriculum, the passage of compulsory attendance laws, increased accountability, and expectations for efficiency (Kowalski, 2005). As school boards evolved in public schools, they appointed school superintendents to manage and lead school districts (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000). The superintendent's job was to implement state curriculum, ensure the professional conduct of employees, and work to maintain the good behavior of students in the classroom (Apple & King 1983; Hayes, 2001; Hirsch, 1987; Jazzar & Algozine, 2007; Kowalski, 2005).

A prominent change to the job occurred in the 1980s as national concerns regarding the state of education grew, launching arguably "the most intense and sustained effort to reform public schools in American history (Hoyle et al., 2005, p. 1). With the governmental release of *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), a significant shift in public schools ensued and impacted the job of the superintendent. This period of intense public education scrutiny ushered in the current era of test-based accountability measures. Hoyle et al., (2005) explained:

High-stakes testing has brought greater local, state, and national accountability to

school districts in a time of greater social problems and inadequate resources to

meet growing needs of a more diverse America. These complex factors have

contributed to a gradual loss of faith in public schools and loss of respect for the

position of the superintendent. (p. ix)

The trust once placed in superintendents to lead was replaced with state and federal

policymakers imposing mandates, parents and teachers demanding involvement in the

decision-making process of schools and districts, and accountability standards that "made

reform not just the trademark of progressive superintendents but a minimum expectation

for the job" (Lashway, 2002, p. 1). Superintendents found themselves expected to be not

just inspirational, visionary leaders of instructors (Black, 2007; Fullan, 2004; Hoyle et al.,

2005; Johnson, 1996) but also leaders of school district reform efforts in an all-out

attempt to increase student achievement as measured by standardized test scores

(Lashway, 2002). This new set of responsibilities was evidenced by the superintendent's

heightened level of communication with various stakeholders throughout the district

(Larson & Rader, 2006; Leithwood & Musella, 1991) and an increased organizational

focus on accountability. Rueter (2009) described this evolution of the job best, stating,

"…there is now a national climate of accountability that, ultimately, rests at the door of

the school superintendent" (p. 1).

Impact of the Superintendency

Though most scholars agree that the position of the superintendent is important

and has a consequential impact on public schools, a great deal of the research

surrounding the superintendency refers to school administration or leadership in general

and is not specific to the role of the superintendent. Often, research on effective

leadership in education is applied to superintendents regardless of whether or not a

particular study investigated superintendent behaviors and beliefs. Research consistently

has supported that effective leadership is essential for success in today's organizations

(Bass, 1998; Bennis & Nanus, 1997; Yukl & Uppal, 2017). As with any organization, the

leadership effectiveness of the superintendent of schools is paramount to the success of

school districts. Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) explained, "The traditions and

beliefs about leadership in schools are not different from those regarding leadership in

other institutions. Leadership is considered to be vital to the successful functioning of

many aspects of a school" (p. 3).

A growing body of research supports the powerful impact of district-level

leadership on educational outcomes (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Hoyle et al., 2005;

Leithwood, Sun, & Pollock, 2017; Maxwell, 1993; Sergiovanni, 2005; Waters et al.,

2006). Nettles and Harrington (2007) confirmed the importance of superintendent

leadership, noting that its influence can make a difference in the improvement of

learning. A study conducted by Waters and Marzano (2006) outlined the importance of

the role of the superintendent of schools. In their research, they found a strong

correlation between district leadership, including the superintendent of schools, and

student achievement. This body of literature does not merely depict effective leadership

as a supporting element alongside other factors that lead toward successful school

districts, it has also found leadership to be one of the most crucial components of success.

Although much of the literature addressing the superintendency supports the need

for the position, there are those scholars who disagree. One example is a study conducted

by Chingos et al., (2014), which investigated the impact the superintendent of schools has on student achievement. K-12 student-level administrative data from Florida and North Carolina were collected over a period of two school years, and multiple findings were discovered, including:

- The longevity of the superintendent's service within a district did not affect student achievement.

- Superintendent turnover had little to no meaningful impact on the achievement of students. Also, they found that superintendent turnover was not associated with improvements in test scores.

Although these researchers did not necessarily argue that the position is not warranted, they concluded that "school district superintendents have very little influence on student achievement in the districts in which they serve" (p. 13).

Another example is from Bennett, Finn, and Cribb (1999), who infamously coined the term "blob" to refer to district-level leadership, including the superintendent of schools. Their research noted that district-level leaders do nothing but protect the public-school establishment. For example, while administrators speak of intensive reform efforts, these scholars found that administrators were actually "circling the wagons to fend off change, or preparing to outflank your innovation. . ." (p. 628). They claimed these efforts were made in an attempt to resist essential reform efforts that could contribute to student achievement.

Testing Environment

High-stakes testing has had and continues to influence the core work of teaching and learning in school districts, and its purpose is to hold schools and districts

accountable for expected student outcomes that are, ostensibly, geared toward creating

and sustaining a more competitive workforce for today's global economy. (Orfield &

Wald, 2000). Proponents of statewide accountability testing believe that schools and

districts can benefit in a variety of ways from high-stakes exams. One example from

Jones et al. (2003) outlined three purposes for high-stakes testing: (a) to provide a way to

measure student achievement accurately, (b) to share and provide information on the

overall quality of education, and (c) to hold both students and educators accountable. It

has also been found that high-stakes testing can measure teachers' ability to teach the

expected curriculum (Evers & Walberg, 2004; Mehrens, 2004). In addition, many that

support these exams believe that the natural competition they provide causes an increase

in performance and achievement. For example, Nichols, Glass, and Berliner (2005)

noted, "When faced with large incentives and threatening punishments, administrators,

teachers, and students, it is believed, will take school more seriously and work harder to

obtain rewards and avoid humiliating punishments" (p. 1).

Even with compelling arguments that support high-stakes testing, there is strong

opposition against its use. Multiple researchers have found high-stakes examinations

narrow educational goals, constrain and stress students and teachers, limit the depth of

curriculum that is being taught, and act as a barrier to postsecondary education (Amrein

& Berliner, 2002; Booher-Jennings, 2005; Haney, 2000; Jones et al., 2003; McNeil, &

Valenzuela, 2001; Nichols, Glass & Berliner, 2005; Siegel, 2004). Scholars have also

confirmed that the greater the stakes of testing, the more narrowing of the curriculum

occurs (Jones et al., 2003; Mesler, 2008; Mitchell, 2006; Moses & Nanna, 2007; Yeh,

2005). Jones (2004) expressed his disagreement with high-stakes testing in public

schools, saying:

> For some time now, it has been apparent to many in the education community that
> state and federal policies intended to develop greater school accountability for the
> learning of all students has been terribly counterproductive. The use of high-
> stakes testing of students has been fraught with flawed assumptions,
> oversimplified understandings of school realities, undermining of the teaching
> profession, and predictably disastrous consequence for our most vulnerable
> students. (p. 584)

Nonetheless, the decades-long evolution of test-driven accountability systems

continues as evidenced by legislative policies at the state and federal levels. As Moses

and Nanna (2007) outlined, high-stakes testing has become a cornerstone of school and

district reform efforts, with the state of Texas often seen as the leader in this particular

area. While these reform efforts maintain the use of standardized tests results as the

primary means of measurement, research continues to support that these examinations

have done little to raise student achievement (Dee & Jacobs, 2006; Hout & Elliott, 2011;

Mason & Watanabe, 2015; Radcliffe & Melon, 2007; Warren, Kulick & Jenkins, 2006).

Still, these exams have become such an integral part of today's public-school system that

students are currently being tested more than at any other time in the history of the United

States (Elbousty, 2009; Jacob, 2005; Nichols, 2003; Stecher, 2002; Steeves et al., 2002;

Wright, 2002).

Evolution Toward an Environment of Testing

The widespread use of testing in United States education can be traced back almost 150 years (Moses & Nanna, 2007). However, the link between student achievement in the form of high-stakes testing and school and district accountability began toward the end of the 1970's (Dorn, 2007). In the preceding decades, local sources had primarily funded public schools, but then a shift in school funding occurred, which created a mix of local and state control in relation to financing. This transition spurred the link between student achievement, high-stakes testing, and school accountability (Smith, 2016) as the new methods of funding created an accountability atmosphere where "legislators wanted some quid pro quo for spending more on education" (Dorn, 2007, p. 6). High-stakes testing became a measurement tool that was used to justify the money invested into public education. Starting in the 1980s, policy reforms in most states began to focus on "increasing measures of accountability and assessing educational outcomes by implementing large-scale standardized tests and, in so doing, galvanized the assessment movement into a national project" (Moses & Nanna, 2007, p. 56). These examinations were seen as a way to increase the quality of educational experiences while providing an objective and uniform approach for assessing students' abilities (Lemann, 1999).

The release of the landmark study, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (1983) significantly catapulted the high-stakes testing movement. Deemed one of ". . . the most influential public policy polemics in the history of the United States" (Guthrie & Springer, 2004, p. 8), *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* stated that the U.S. educational system was in crisis and needed major reforms (Jones, Jones, & Hargrove, 2003). The report notably stated that the U.S.

was caught in "a rising tide of mediocrity" (A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform, 1983, para 1) and if efforts were not aimed at reforming the public school system, the nation's ability to compete economically across the world would be severely impacted (Mehta, 2015). This report, coupled with lawmakers' desire to have more accountability regarding educational spending, underpins the foundation of the standardized testing movement.

Following *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, a series of reports and laws ensued. First, the National Governors Association's released its own report, *Time for Results* (1986)*, and *after* its publication, many states began to implement high-stakes testing (Carver, 2008). Soon to follow, *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* was signed into law, which aligned state assessments to academic standards (Carver, 2008). In 2002, the 107th U.S. Congress signed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) into law, and a great deal of high-stakes testing and accountability ensued (Tingey, 2009), which further propelled the evolution of a testing environment in public schools. The act was intended to improve teaching methods and proficiency in both reading and math and also to close the achievement gap between the various subpopulations within public schools, especially for at-risk children. With the creation of this act, high-stakes examinations became the standard for evaluating school improvement efforts and public-school effectiveness, and the legislation was a significant shift in policy. It added another layer to school and district accountability, moving control from the state and placing it firmly in the hands of the federal government at an estimated cost of $2 billion (Kiely & Henry, 2001).

In 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) replaced NCLB and was designed to provide states with more control over how they set goals for their students. Within the ESSA, each state is required to provide a comprehensive overview of how it will advance its vision and goals that lead towards student success. The education plan for Texas highlights multiple features, which include goals for increasing students' state-mandated test scores (U.S. Department of Education, 2017) and a rating system that scores districts on a grading scale of A-F. Although ESSA's measurement of these goals and overall student effectiveness is still centered primarily on the results of high-stakes testing, non-academic factors, such as education in social and emotional learning and character education, have been included in the overall measurement. Regardless of the additional, non-academic measurements, a vast majority of the state's accountability will continue to be based on test scores. In fact, for elementary and middle school ratings, school accountability will be solely based on student performance on the state's mandated test.

Impact of a High-Stakes Testing Environment

From educational staff to students, the impact that high-stakes examinations have on a district is astounding. As high-stakes testing has become the educational reform choice for many schools and districts (Jones et al., 2003), several unintended consequences have surfaced that impact public education in a variety of ways. Madaus et al., (2009) found a number of consequences, including the narrowing of the curriculum to that of tested subjects, cheating and/or corrupting test results, creating "bubble" students, retaining students in grades, increasing the dropout rate, and an increase in student and

teacher anxiety. Below is a description of some of the ways high-stakes testing has and is affecting superintendents, teachers, students, and curriculum and instruction.

Impact on teaching, learning, and curriculum. High stakes testing is narrowing the curriculum and instruction that take place in public schools (Corbett & Wilson, 1991; Madaus et al., 2009; McNeil, 2000; Orfield & Wald, 2000). As states align school and district accountability ratings with high-stakes testing, research has found that teachers are shifting their instruction to increase attention on the tested areas (Corbett & Wilson, 1991; McNeil, 2000). In fact, narrowing the curriculum to that of the tested subjects has been reported in virtually every state (Borko & Stecher, 2001; Jones & Johnston, 2002). In a study conducted by Berliner (2011), since the introduction of NCLB, multiple subjects have seen a reduction of instructional time. He found that social studies, science, physical education, recess, art, and music have seen a decrease of at least 28% in the instructional time allotted per week. Former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor scrutinized this problem in curriculum and instruction noting that the high-stakes testing environment:

> . . . has effectively squeezed out civics education because there is no testing for that anymore and no funding for that. At least half of the states no longer make the teaching of civics and government a requirement for high school graduation. This leaves a huge gap, and we can't forget that the primary purpose of public schools in America has always been to help produce citizens who have the knowledge and the skills and the values to sustain our republic as a nation, our democratic form of government. (O'Connor, quoted in Berliner, 2011, p.209)

Supporters of high-stakes testing contended that this narrowing of the curriculum should be the case, and argue that teachers should carefully align their instruction with the tested curriculum if they truly desire to improve test results and accountability measurements and show evidence of learning (Gayler et al., 2003; Jones et al., 2003; Madaus et al., 2009; Perkins & Wellman, 2008; Stecher, 2002; Yeh, 2005). However, those who oppose high-stakes testing disagree. They posit that since the curriculum has been narrowed to focus on the tested subjects, the time needed for instruction designed to teach critical thinking and creativity has been drastically reduced and has limited overall instructional opportunities (Lay & Brown, 2009; Smith & Rottenberg, 1991; Valenzuela, 2000).

As the narrowing of the curriculum continues, opportunities for students to pursue their learning interests are reduced or even eliminated. When the content of the curriculum taught is relevant to student's interest, student engagement increases, and learning occurs exponentially (Berliner, 2011; Schlechty, 2009). Yet, as Berliner (2011) explains, the high-stakes testing environment provides a barrier to curriculum dedicated to student interest:

But in this era of high stakes testing, students cannot be allowed time in school to follow their particular interests in dinosaurs, medieval armaments, the American civil war, fashion design, horses, whales, or other areas where students show intellectual passion. It is the assessment system that defines what students should know at different grade levels, and deviation from that plan is considered dangerous because it might result in missing curriculum coverage of material reflected in some items on a high stakes accountability test. (pp. 294-295)

Impact on students. Curricular and instructional impacts are not the only ones impacted by high-stakes testing. Students are feeling the effects as well, and testing anxiety is on the rise because of the emphasis placed on high standardized test scores. Researchers have found that 20% to 33% of all students suffer from testing anxiety (McCaleb-Kahan & Weener, 2009; von der Embse, 2008). Larson, El Ramahi, Estes, and Ghibellini (2010) explained that "today's students are associating a greater sense of consequence with the prospect of being tested, resulting in feelings of pressure to perform and fear of not performing adequately" (p. 3). Stress and tension among students have increased, along with feelings of worthlessness, fear, and dread, all of which lead to lower self-esteem (Black, 2005; Blazer, 2011 Brown, Galassi, & Alos, 2004; Reddell, 2010).

Impact on teachers. High-stakes testing has had a tremendous impact on teachers. From changes in teaching practices and time spent in and out of class preparing for standardized tests to the anxiety that influences their relationships with students and the community, teachers have felt the repercussions of the testing movement personally and professionally. Teacher stress has been on the rise since the introduction of high-stakes testing into public schools, and they live with the known effects on their students and the disadvantages that can ensue from failing high-stakes examinations (Minarechova, 2012). For example, a national report found 7 out of 10 teachers felt increased stress, and 2 out of 3 believed that precious teaching time was being taken away due to test preparations (Sadker & Zittleman, 2004).

Coupled with the stress associated with high-stakes testing, the pressure to perform well is causing teachers to re-think careers in education. Teachers are leaving

the profession due to multiple factors related to the high-stakes testing environment including increased accountability and more stringent standards (Haney, 2000; Jones et al., 1999; Kohn, 2000), as well as a decrease in teacher autonomy, insight, and creativity inside their classrooms (Rapp, 2002). For those who stay in teaching, the pressure to perform well on these exams has increased instances of cheating (Bohte & Meier, 2000). As test scores and school ratings have become a determinant of a teacher's perceived ability to instruct and a school's perceived success, some adults are choosing to do whatever it takes to meet accountability demands. The National Center for Fair and Open Testing (2013) found some form of cheating on standardized tests in 37 of 50 states, as well as 50 different ways in which schools have attempted to inflate their test scores. To name a few, the study found instances of schools retaining students that scored low on tests, overlooking notes with answers that were brought into class on test day, and asking students to "double-check" responses that were erroneous. As long as the environment of high-stakes examinations remains in public schools, teachers will continue to feel its effects and will have their mental health and ethics challenged.

Impact on Principals. As leadership practices of campus principals have been found to be critical to a school's success (Fullan, 2001; 2003; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Reeves, 2000; Sergiovanni, 2006), so too have principals felt the impact of high-stakes testing. Increased pressures related to accountability ratings and high-stakes exams have led to low principal morale and reports of principals feeling a lack of professional value (Paufler, 2018; Reed, McDonough, Ross, & Robichaux, 2001). Campus principals note that their educational intentions and purpose have been distorted,

their sense of right and wrong interfered with, and their integrity corrupted all because of the pressure to perform on high-stakes assessments (Guskey, 2007).

However, not all campus principals oppose the pressures created by the high-stakes testing environment. Vang (2015) reported that some principals value a test-based accountability system, and the pressure to perform well ultimately defines the learning goals of the campus and district while molding a culture that strives to improve student achievement. Additionally, Reed et al. (2001) found that principals who tend to embrace the high-stakes testing environment are typically the ones leading campuses that perform well on state accountability measures. On the contrary, they also discovered a culture of fear prevalent in lower-performing districts.

Principals' job security has also been impacted by the high stakes testing environment. Principals have been suspended, transferred, or in some cases, fired from their positions due to poor test scores leading to low accountability ratings (Kohn, 2000). Some state departments of education mandate principal removal due to poor performance on state-mandated tests (Kohn, 2000). Because of these increased pressures to perform, some principals have made unethical decisions, such as cheating, to ensure their school meets or exceeds expected ratings (Goldberg, 2004). Many principals are also choosing to leave their positions due to the high-stakes testing environment. When asked if they would consider staying in the role of principal for the next 5 years, Reed et al. (2001) found that 41% of campus principals were either unsure or had no intention to continue in the principalship.

Impact on Superintendents. The effect that the high-stakes environment has had on school superintendents has not been deeply explored (McGhee & Nelson, 2005).

Much of the literature regarding the impact of this environment is either on school leadership in general or on principals. However, some research on high-stakes testing and the superintendency has emerged. Johnstone, Dikkers, and Luedeke (2003) found that regardless of their stance on high-stakes testing and accountability, superintendents are being forced to pay attention to accountability measures that are based on state-mandated exams so that state funding continues for their districts. Not only is this environment causing superintendents to use a form of measurement and accountability that they may not believe in, but they are also in danger of developing unfavorable perceptions among employees. For example, in one study conducted by Rapp (2002), 97% of teachers believe the high-stakes testing environment negatively impacts students' love of learning, and 90% of teachers believe that this environment is harming student and classroom culture. Yet, superintendents are asked by their state departments to uphold the system. Johnstone et al., (2009) explained, "Superintendents are currently tasked with upholding an assessment system that is deemed to be overly narrow by many school personnel" (p. 14).

Regardless of the predicament superintendents are placed in regarding testing, funding, and employee perceptions, a study conducted by Harris, Irons, and Crawford (2006) discovered that superintendents have concerns with student success being solely measured via high-stakes assessments. They found that superintendents expressed grave concerns regarding the focus on statewide testing, including a loss of quality instructional time, a lack of funding, and an overall narrowing of the curriculum. The researchers explained that superintendents would much rather work toward developing a culture of

learning based on an attainment of a broader, student-centered curriculum than focus on externally derived test and accountability measures.

An unintended consequence of the high-stakes testing environment is increased job turnover of the school superintendent. McGhee and Nelson (2005) explained that the charge of improving schools set forth by policymakers and the emphasis placed on outcomes of high-stakes testing has begun to take a toll on superintendents; they are leaving the profession or being removed from the job because of test scores. Asbury (2008) affirmed, finding that decreasing state-mandated test scores and accountability measures are a significant factor in superintendent turnover. Some studies have shown the longevity and tenure of the school superintendent in a district is a determining factor in successful student achievement (Waters & Marzano, 2006). In fact, a study conducted by Johnson, Huffman, Madden, and Shope (2011) concluded that districts having two or more superintendents in a 10-year period had lower student achievement results and thus poorer accountability ratings than those schools with no superintendent turnover. Those lowered ratings can cascade throughout a community; as one example, low test scores can lead to a district being designated as poor performing, and that can depress the market value of homes zoned within that school district (Simpson, 2013).

The Purpose of Schools

Since the Declaration of Independence, public schools have been a cornerstone of American Democracy. Throughout its existence, the purpose of schools and schooling has been heavily debated. In fact, a vast amount of research and literature has been written on its aims. Dewey (1934) defined the purpose of schools as a means to "to give the young the things they need in order to develop in an orderly, sequential way into

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members of society" (p. 1). Foshay (1991) claimed the purpose of schooling "has been to bring people to as full a realization as possible of what it is to be a human being" (p. 277). Gow (1989) described the purpose in more specifics as one that "cultivates minds and characters, that communicates and affirms ethical normality, and that helps young people develop the moral and intellectual discernment needed to distinguish between true and false, right and wrong, noble and base" (p. 546).

The way school districts describe the purpose of schools is through their vision and mission. Vision statements describe the direction the district is heading and should be challenging enough to demand greater performance by the district (Lipton 1996; Nanus 1992; Porth, 2011). Mission statements, similar to vision statements, indicate what the district stands for; why it exists and what is the district's fundamental purpose (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Price, 2012). These statements are imperative if districts desire to have a purpose, their work be focused, consistent, and intentional, and to take a path to achieve success. (Wilkins, 2017).

One study, conducted by Price (2012), examined the common themes found within an organization's vision statement. In his study, 8 themes were discovered which included, future direction, time frame, innovation, responsiveness, motivation, slogan, core ideology, and fiscal concerns. While many school districts' vision and mission statement coincide with Price's (2012) findings, it can be argued that the high-stakes testing environment is overtly or covertly impeding attainment of these educational vision themes. Price (2012) concluded that there should be a correlation between an organization's vision, strategies, and language used. "Since there is a relationship between the organization vision and strategy, there should also be a relationship between

the organization strategy and the vision words" (Price, 2012, p. 35). While there is a requirement that every district in Texas adopts a vision statement (Texas Education Code, §11.151 (b) (2)), and almost all school districts also have mission statements, questions remain as to how much time and resources are allocated toward pursuing this vision and mission versus sufficing state-mandated testing improvements. Thus, superintendents in Texas are often challenged with a dilemma of conflicting priorities; inspiring and aspiring toward the purpose of schools and schooling while satisfying the demands of the high-stakes testing environment.

Future Ready Superintendents. One group of Texas public school superintendents that have embarked on developing schools and districts that are aligned with the expressed purpose of schools is the Texas Association of School Administrators' (TASA) Future Ready Superintendent's Leadership Network (FRSLN). Designed in 2015, FRSLN is a network of school superintendents who work to build and initiate innovative, systematic change within their school districts (TASA, 2018). Six guiding principles were developed, by the network, to assist superintendents who wish to lead their districts past the current status quo of public schools and create school districts that align with the expressed purpose of schools. Those principles are:

- Digital Learning,

- High Priority Learning Standards,

- Multiple Assessments,

- College and Career Readiness,

- Community-Based Accountability, and

- Organizational Transformation. (TASA, 2008)

Throughout their involvement in FRSLN, this small network of Texas superintendents has

> . . . gained enhanced capabilities to lead in times of change, increased their capacity
> to transform the system, developed a sustained collaborative network among their
> institute peers, and realize clarity of vision as they focused on creating models of
> future-ready schools throughout the state. (TASA, 2014, p. 4)

Currently, 53 superintendents make up this network and continue to meet regularly in efforts to turn their vision of public schools into action (TASA, 2014).

Goal Displacement

As superintendents pursue the vision and mission of the school districts they lead, the environment of high-stakes may cause a conflict of priorities. While many visions and missions of public school districts strive to develop their students as well-rounded and productive members of society, many goals established in schools and districts are geared toward increased performance on state-mandated tests. The challenges associated with these conflicting aims is one of goal displacement.

As described by Merton (1957), goal displacement occurs when an organization neglects their primary goals and aspirations in lieu of ones that are associated with building or maintaining the organization. Studies have been conducted that highlight goal displacement in organizations. Warner and Havens (1968) explained that goal displacement is a problem in many organizations because they "concentrate upon activities and programs that contribute relatively little to the attainment of their major goals" (p. 539). Waterman and Gill (2005) suggested that some organizations have multiple and conflicting missions, which have goals embedded into each mission and that

can cause confusions and thus, goal displacement. Consequently, in a study conducted by

Bohte and Meir (2000), public education was where instances of goal displacement were

most heavily observed. They found that public bureaucracies such as public schools tend

to find themselves contradicting the outcomes they seek. When charged with addressing

the complex social problems that have vague and overarching goals, public-schools look

for ways to identify concrete and specific measures of their organizational performance

(Bohte & Meir, 2000).

Examples of vague goals such as "improving the wellbeing of people" (Warner

and Havens, 1968, p. 542) are difficult to measure thus lend themselves to goal

displacement (Bohte and Meir, 2000). Vague goals can lack specific and concrete ways

of measuring organization performance and are thus replaced with goals that are

measurable. Warner and Havens (1957) stated that goal displacement occurs in

organizations because they "have to act, and they can only act in a concrete way" (p.

546). This concrete and measurable way of acting can conflict with missions and visions

that are rarely quantifiable.

With the introduction of the high-stakes testing environment, goal displacement

has become more prevalent in public schools. For example, in accordance with the Texas

Education Code (§11.151 (b) (2)), public schools are required to adopt a vision statement

that sets the direction of the school district. However, due to state accountability

pressures, objective measures are being established that include specific test score results

that directly displace the adopted visions and missions including the overall purpose of

education. Gunzenhauser (2003) affirmed this juxtaposition, stating that "high-stakes

testing brings with it a 'default' philosophy of education" (p. 51). He went on to explain

". . . [the philosophy] places an inordinate value on the scores achieved on high-stakes test, rather than on the achievement that the scores are meant to represent" (p. 51).

While educational policy is high on the agenda of governments across the world, and the outcomes of performance have gained increased attention due to their implications for economic prosperity and social citizenship (Bell & Stevenson, 2006). Due to this drive for performance and fiscal outcomes, governments have begun to ensure the monitoring of policy is taking place. Policy monitoring is a type of goal displacement in which specific outputs and outcomes of bureaucratic organizations can be tracked, by policymakers, so that the organization's performance and continuity in practices are ensured (Pratt & Zeckhauser, 1985; Wood & Waterman, 1994). When policy monitoring is implemented, information that is measurable is provided objectively and systemically (Wood & Waterman, 1994). Its purpose is to collect data and review periodically to ensure that bureaucratic agencies are progressing towards and achieving desired goals at a low financial cost (Wood & Waterman, 1994). As such, policy monitoring allows government officials to be involved in the development of the policy and the accountability of results. According to Walker (2009), once the policy is implemented and sustained and data are collected and analyzed, elected officials can take corrective action if necessary.

While public schools are an example of a bureaucratic organization, the presence of policy monitoring is rooted in the high-stakes testing environment. In this instance, policy monitoring focuses primarily on student achievement on high-stakes, state-mandated tests (Walker, 2009). Bohte and Meier (2000) commented that the focus of policy monitoring on measurement and evaluation of outputs rather than the achievement

of meaningful outcomes can lead to a culture of fear. In public schools, they found this

fear of poor performance and negative evaluations can lead administrators to devote more

attention to ensuring satisfactory accountability ratings regardless of the impact their

leadership behaviors may have on the culture of the organization or the outcome. As

district ratings hinge on the results of high-stakes, state mandated tests, superintendents

are faced with the predicament of choosing to focus on improving test scores or pursuing

the district's loftier vision, mission and the purpose of schools. As Walker (2009)

declared, "This is a form of goal displacement where the original goals are obscured by

the pressures to perform well" (p. 4).

Organizational Culture

As organizations strive to achieve success, the influence of the organization's

culture is a powerful determinant, and its importance cannot be overstated (Deal &

Patterson, 2009). Chatterjee, Pereira, and Bates (2018) characterized an organizational

culture as a critical component of the work environment. Many researchers agreed with

this finding, and a wealth of literature outlines the impact culture can have on an

organization. In one study of organizational culture's footprint, Hartnell, Ou and Kinicki

(2011) discovered over 4,600 articles examining the topic of organizational culture since

1980, and they explained the impetus behind this vast amount of research is the powerful

influence culture has on an organization and the behaviors of its associated individuals.

What makes the culture of an organization so paramount is that it provides a sense of

identity, a clear directional vision and mission, and a focused process in decision-making,

all of which lead to practices and strategies that impact the organization's success.

(Collins, 2001; Epstein, Buhovac, & Yuthas, 2010; Schein, 2010; Weese, 1996). Culture

is part of the organization's life, and it affects the behaviors, attitudes, and effectiveness of employees (Hofstede, 1991; Linberg & Martin, 1991).

Organizational Culture Defined

Varying definitions and descriptions of organizational culture have been formulated throughout the literature. Wilson (2012) generalized that organizational culture is a set of assumptions and beliefs about the organization that sets it apart from others. Hofstede (1994) defined it as a pattern of consistent, organizational activities and behaviors of a group. Owen (1998) described it as "the behavioral norms, assumptions, and beliefs or an organization" (p. 165).

Even with the multiple attempts to define organizational culture by researchers, what has been consistent are the following characteristics: (a) it is shared amongst members (Glisson & James, 2002), (b) it exists within multiple groups and at various levels of the organization (Detert, Schroeder, & Mauriel, 2000), (c) it influences the attitudes and behaviors of employees (Smircich, 1983), and (d) it consists of the collective values, beliefs, and assumptions of the organization (Schein, 2010). For this study, I used Schein's (2004) definition which is stated as:

> a pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved its problems
> of external adaptation and internal integration that has worked well enough to be
> considered valid and, therefore, taught to new members as the current way to
> perceive, think, and feel in relations to connection with the problems. (p. 17)

In his work, Schein (2004) identified three levels of organizational culture. Artifacts, such as dress, are at the surface and relatively easy to discern. The second level includes espoused values, which refers to an organization's stated rules, goals and norms. The

third level includes shared basic assumptions, which are often taken for granted and difficult to recognize from within an organization. Figure 1 shows how each of the three levels works in relation to each other.

Artifacts
The visible organizational
structures and processes
(hard to decipher)

Espoused Beliefs and Values
Strategies, goals, philosophies (espoused
justifications)

Underlying Assumptions
Unconscious, taken-for-granted beliefs, perceptions, thoughts,
and feelings (ultimate source of values and actions)
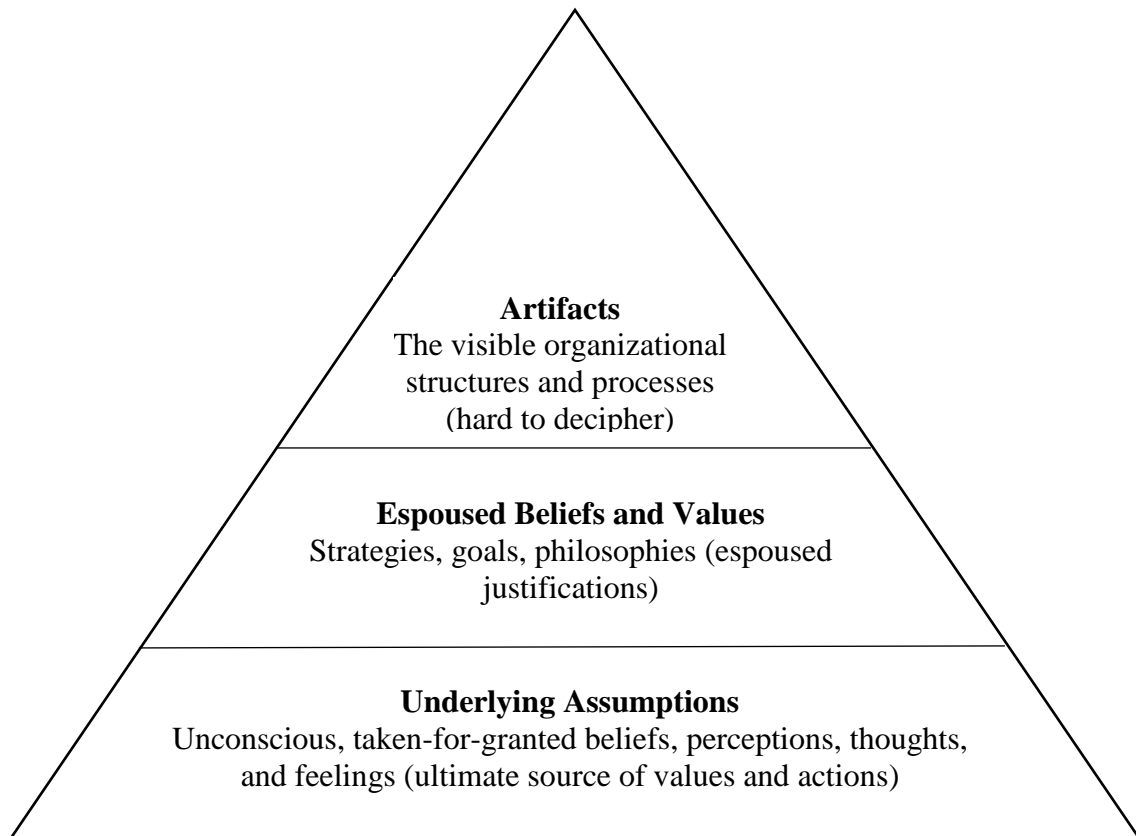
Figure 1. Levels of Culture as defined by Schein (2004, p. 26).

Organizational Culture in School Districts

An organizational culture exists in all school districts and individual schools. Although it may be hard to describe, internal and external stakeholders know the characteristics of the district's culture as it helps them identify the district as their own (Deal & Peterson, 2009).

Though some may disagree, Barth (2002) feels strongly about organizational culture:

A school's culture has far more influence on life and learning in the schoolhouse than the president of the country, the state department of education, the superintendent, the school board, or even the principal, teacher, and parents can ever have. (p. 6)

Deal and Peterson (2016) described organizational culture as affecting all aspects of a school or district. They outlined the informal and formal way that culture is created and sustained. From conversations in the lunchroom to the way in which student learning is ensured, their research cross-references multiple years of literature. They identified the following six examples of how a school district's culture can have a positive influence:

- Fosters school effectiveness and productivity;

- Improves collegiality, communication, and problem solving;

- Promotes innovation and improvement;

- Builds commitment and kindles motivation;

- Amplifies the energy, vitality, and trust of school staff members, students, and community; and

- Focuses attention on what is important and valued. (pp. 14-15)

While culture impacts many aspects of a school district, the direction and goals set forth by leaders can swiftly re-direct a culture. Yan (2016) described how an organization's culture can fluctuate depending on these aims and goals, noting that organizational culture, ". . . exists along a continuum, from a strong culture shared by the various subgroups in the organization to a weak culture, in which the declared aims of management may be at odds with workers norms and values. . ." (Yan, 2016, p. 957). Kight and Kight (2017) found that an organization's culture is not achieved by leaders

simply proclaiming which acceptable behaviors are desired. They explained that culture is instead created by practicing, promoting, and permitting the behaviors of the organization and that it is leadership that creates the culture, one that will drive new behaviors. Herein lies the importance of the superintendent's role in managing the influence of its district's culture.

A Superintendent's Influence on Organizational Culture

A school district's culture is substantially influenced by the superintendent of schools (Adams, Donnelly, & Smith, 2012; Williams & Hatch, 2012). While there is no script or guidelines that superintendents follow to influence their district's organizational culture, research points to the importance their role plays in the process. Schein (2009) found that an organization's culture and its leader are intertwined. He noted that when organizations fail to recognize this partnership, success cannot be achieved, stating:

> In an age in which leadership is touted over and over again as a critical variable in defining the success or failure of organizations, it becomes all the more important to look at the other side of the leadership coin – how leaders create culture and how culture defines and creates leaders. (Schein, 2004, p. xi)

More studies have recognized the link between leadership and organizational culture. Deal and Patterson (2009) specified if district leadership is to be effective, the superintendent must have a rich understanding of the district's culture as well as the ability to shape it. This is done by "influencing an environment that affects the behaviors of principals, teachers and students" (Adams et al., 2012, p. 2).

Embedding Mechanisms. As superintendents look for ways to shape and influence their organizational culture, Schein (2010) offered six primary mechanisms to

identify how leadership within an organization can influence their organization's culture. Figure 2 lists his primary embedding mechanisms.

- What leaders pay attention to, measure, and control on a regular basis;

- How leaders react to critical incidents and organization crises;

- How leaders allocate resources;

- Deliberate role modeling, teaching, and coaching;

- How leaders allocate rewards and status; and

- How leaders recruit, select, promote, and excommunicate.

Figure 2. Primary Embedding Mechanisms. Retrieved from Schein (2010, p. 236).

These mechanisms are the "major 'tools' leaders have available to teach their organizations how to perceive, think, feel, and behave based on their own conscious and unconscious convictions" (p. 236). The mechanisms are the catalysts for the culture superintendents hope to establish and sustain. As superintendents look to influence their organization's culture, their leadership practices related to each of these mechanisms will impact how employees feel about and respond to high-stakes testing.

What leaders pay attention to, measure, and control. The first of Schein's (2010) embedding mechanisms describes what the leader of the organization pays attention to. He identified this mechanism as the most powerful of the six when communicating what the organization believes, stands for, and cares about. If leaders are consistent with their messages and behaviors of what they pay attention to, communication of the organization's beliefs will be strong. Meetings and other activities associated with planning and budgeting signal what leaders care about and pay attention to. In contrast, he noted other powerful signals of what leaders do not pay attention to

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also influence an organization's culture. Examples such as delayed meetings, cost overruns, and lack of detail in produces and services indicate that the leader is not in control nor are they paying attention to these factors.

How leaders react to critical incidents and organizational crises. Schein (2010) found the reactions of individuals in the organization during times of crisis "reveals important underlying assumptions and creates new norms, values, and working procedures" (p. 243). He discovered that during times of heightened emotional involvement, the intensity of learning increases. As people experience crisis, they naturally want to avert feelings of anxiety and remove themselves from the situation. Schein (2010) also noted that when "people share intense emotional experiences and collectively learn how to reduce anxiety, they are more likely to remember what they have learned and to ritually repeat that behavior to avoid anxiety" (p. 243).

How leaders allocate resources. Schein (2010) identified the way in which leaders of organizations create and allocate resources reveals their assumptions and beliefs. A study by Donaldson and Lorsch (1983) found that the allocation of resources is influenced by the choice in organizational goals. If district budgets emphasize purchasing materials and supporting programs that seek to improve state-mandated test scores, district employees are likely to assume that the exams are significantly important and will direct their goals toward improving results. Budgeting is not the only resource that can be measured for importance; time is another example of how a leader can allocate organizational resources. As school districts allocate time for the professional development of their employees, the way in which time is used can point toward district beliefs. For example, if at the beginning of the year, professional development focuses

primarily on examining the previous year's state-mandated test scores, one might assume that these tests are important to the district. These invisible messages that superintendents portray shape the organizational culture of the school district.

Deliberate role modeling, teaching, and coaching. Kouzes and Posner (2010) addressed the impact that role modeling, teaching, and coaching by leaders have on an organization. They identified eight truths of leadership with "leading by example" as one of those truths. They found people in an organization watch leaders for their leadership practices and that those actions model the expected and appropriate behaviors for the entire organization. Schein (2010) also commented that the way leaders act in the workplace communicates the expected behaviors of the organization and that leaders are typically aware of their influence in this manner.

How leaders allocate rewards and status. Schein (2010) discovered that "Members of an organization learn from their own experience with promotions, from performance appraisals, and from discussion with the boss what the organization values and what the organization punishes" (p. 247). He noted the behaviors that are rewarded and those that are punished carry the message of what is expected in the organization. However, there can be confusion about the actual practices and behaviors exhibited in organizations. He commented, "I am referring here to the actual practices—what really happens—not what is espoused, published, or preached" (Schein, 2010, p. 247). Kight and Kight (2017) described the importance of understanding the correlation between stated behaviors and culture and actual behaviors culture. They remarked that organizations do not get the culture they proclaim; instead, organizations develop a culture by what the leader practices, promotes, and permits.

How leaders select, promote, and excommunicate. Recruiting and hiring great personnel are critical to any organization's success. Some researchers found that hiring exceptional teaching staff has been noted as the most important task that a K-12 administrator does (Fitzgerald, 2009; Hindman & Strong, 2009; Winter, 1995). One of the most powerful ways a leader's assumptions and expectations about personnel are ingrained into the organization is the process of selecting new members (Schein, 2010). People are the center of any organization (Bolman & Deal, 2013), and for public school superintendents, the hiring of exceptional employees is critical, especially for those who will be in leadership positions.

Summary

This literature review highlighted the superintendency, the high-stakes testing environment, goal displacement, and organizational culture. A vast amount of literature showcased how each influences and impacts public education. As the role of the superintendent has evolved dramatically over the past decades, the demands placed on the job are increasing. In addition, implications from the high-stakes testing environment influence public schools and the role of the superintendent. After considering the research presented in this literature review, it has become clear that the leadership practices of school superintendents shape the district's organizational culture. However, a gap in the literature has been found. The way in which superintendents respond to the high-stakes testing environment while advancing the vision and mission of the school districts is not clear in the body of literature. As established in the purpose of the study, this dissertation aimed to inform current scholars and practitioners of the leadership practices that superintendents employ as well as fill the gap that is found in the literature.

III. RESEARCH DESIGN

The review of the literature in chapter two outlined the framework of this study. Based on the research goals and the dissertation's purpose, the research design will explain how this study was conducted. In particular, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What perceived leadership practices does a superintendent engage in to pursue the district's mission and vision in an environment of high-stakes testing with

   - central office administrators;

   - campus administrators; and

   - school board members?

2. How are the leadership practices of the superintendent, in relation to the districts' mission and vision in an environment of high-stakes testing, perceived by

   - central office administrators;

   - campus administrators; and

   - school board members?

Research Perspectives

The dissertation's topic and research questions have guided me to conduct a qualitative study. Corbin and Strauss (2008) have explained that qualitative research "allows researchers to get at the inner experience of participants, to determine how meanings are formed through and in culture, and to discover rather than test variables" (p. 12). Employing a qualitative methodology allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the leadership practices exhibited by superintendents and how these practices can

influence others internally in the district and externally in the community. The role of the

researcher in qualitative research is one who is "interested in understanding how people

interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meanings they

attribute to their experiences" (Merriam, 2009, p. 5). More specifically, my role in this

study was to uncover how superintendents describe, think about, and reflect upon their

leadership practices while leading their school districts toward meeting their respective

missions and visions as they simultaneously navigate the high-stakes testing

environment. Schein's (2010) six primary embedding mechanisms were used as a

conceptual framework to help develop the appropriate interview questions for data

discovery. A multiple case study was conducted via a constructionist epistemology while

using an interpretivist theoretical perspective and a grounded theory methodology.

Figure 3 provides an overview of the perspectives that I will utilize in this study.
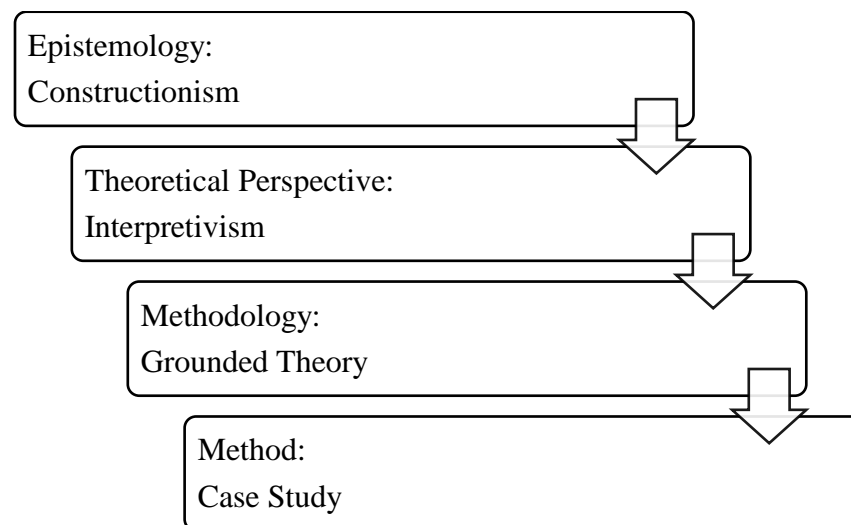
Figure 3. Research Design Perspective*s*. Adapted from Crotty (1998, p. 4).

Epistemology: Constructionism

Epistemology is the nature of our knowledge, how it is acquired and constructed (Merriam, 2009; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Knowledge is developed "through the subjective experiences of people" (Creswell, 2013, p. 20). The epistemology of constructionism, according to Crotty (1998), is a view in which "*all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context* [italics from original]" (p. 42). Based on my experiences in public education as a teacher, principal, superintendent, and parent, I have come to hold the idea that our experiences define our beliefs and that they shape the ways in which we think and behave. My personal understanding of how I interpret knowledge and meaning has guided me toward the utilization of constructionism as the epistemological lens for this research design.

Within a constructionism epistemology, the views of the individual are that of a sense-maker, i.e., every individual seeks to understand what it is they are experiencing so that they may make sense of the world they live in (Berger & Luckman, 1966; Gergen, 1999). The meanings that we make, or the sense-making we develop, is socially constructed through our interactions with the world we interpret (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Crotty, 1998). As superintendents interact with others, experiences are created while beliefs are constructed, both by the superintendent and the individual(s) that are involved in the interaction. As every individual is different, each person constructs meaning in his or her own unique way, and everyone provides meaning to the encounters they experience. "There is no objective truth waiting for us to discover it. Truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our

world. There is no meaning without a mind" (Crotty, 1998, p. 8). By drawing on

Merriam's (2009) suggestions that constructionism can help understand self-constructed

meanings, the researcher was able to evaluate how different people interpret their

experiences, the ways in which they fashion their worlds (or views), and the values they

place on their experiences.

Theoretical Perspective: Interpretivism

Epistemology informs the theoretical perspective (Glesne, 2011), which is "the

philosophical stance lying behind the methodology" (Crotty, 1988, p. 66). Crotty (1988)

described the theoretical perspective as "a way of looking at the world and making sense

of it" (p. 8). He went on to add that it involves knowledge and helps one to understand

"*how we know what we know* [italics from original]" (p. 8). Because the purpose of my

research was to understand how superintendents lead and respond in the high-stakes

testing environment, I chose an interpretivist theoretical perspective.

Brunner and Björk (2001) have explained that the administration of education is

continuously progressing due to the organization and use of knowledge from leaders

across the field. Leaders create, reconstruct, and respond to organizations based on their

own beliefs. As they experience situations, leaders bring their own conceptual

frameworks to every situation, which have been constructed from their specific

experiences and thus influence how they respond to situations (Lodico, Spaulding, &

Voegtle, 2006). The idea of individual creation of meaning is termed interpretivism.

According to Crotty (1998), the purpose of the theory of interpretivism is to

"understand and explain human and social reality" (pp. 66-67). He observed that each

individual views and interprets the world in their own way which ultimately shapes their

knowledge and thereby constructs their meaning. The aim of interpretive research is to look to understand how members of social groups "enact their particular realities and endow them with meaning, and to show how these meanings, beliefs, and intentions of those members help constitute their actions" (Orlinkowski & Baroudi, 1991, p. 14). Creswell and Creswell (2018) found the intent of interpretive researchers is "to make sense of (or interpret) the meaning others have about the world" (p. 8). Incorporating the theoretical perspective of interpretivism allowed me to explain the leadership practices superintendents engage in when establishing and sustaining a culture in which meaning is shared across the school district. As Goldkuhl (2012) suggested, the core premise of interpretivism is "to work with these subjective meanings already there in the social world; i.e., to acknowledge their existence, to reconstruct them, to understand them, to avoid distorting them, to use them as building blocks in theorizing" (p. 5).

Methodology: Grounded Theory

Methodology, according to Schwandt (2007), is "a theory of how inquiry should proceed. It involves analysis of the assumptions, principles, and procedures in a particular approach to inquiry" (p. 193). As I looked to discover practices of superintendents through the epistemological lens of constructionism and the theoretical perspective of interpretivism, the basis of my methodology was grounded theory. Grounded theory was developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as a response to qualitative research not being taken seriously as it was viewed as "subjective, impressionistic, and anecdotal rather than objective, systematic, and generalizable" (p. 56). Their purpose, in the development of grounded theory, was to provide validity to qualitative research while using some of the analytical tools found in quantitative research (Butler, 2017). As such,

grounded theory is not so much a theory as it is a methodology that is grounded in the data (Butler, 2017; Crotty, 1998; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002; Schwandt, 2015). Schwandt (2015) described the "theory" in grounded theory as theoretical ideas such as concepts, models, and formal theories.

Merriam (2009) defined grounded theory as a methodology that is built on an everyday-world situation and has a form of usefulness to practitioners that other theories may lack. Data from grounded theory research can come from a wide array of sources, including documents, interviews, and observations (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Through data collection and analysis, grounded theory can allow the researcher to derive meaning that emerges or is grounded in the data. Crotty (1998) explained, "Throughout the process, it seeks to ensure that the theory emerging arises from the data and not from some other sources" (p. 78). Simply stated, the purpose is to build theory from data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). By using grounded theory as a methodology, the data that I collected allowed for me to create a model, concept, or theory of superintendent leadership practices; practices that are utilized to pursue the mission and vision of the district in the environment of high-stakes testing.

Method: Case Study

The method of research in this qualitative study was that of a multiple case study. The basis of case-study research brings forward a decision or set of decisions, the reasons they were made, how they were implemented, and the results that were obtained (Schramm, 1971). The aims and purpose of my study and the research questions developed aligned with case study research. Merriam (2009) advocated for case-study research, deeming that the insights and meanings that it illuminates play a significant role

in advancing a field's knowledge base. She described case-study research as "a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance" (p. 50). Although the research questions and the theoretical components of the study support the use of a case study, a prominent criticism of this research method is generalization (Stake 2005; Yin, 2014). Simply stated, how can one case speak for an entire group? While case studies are limited in their ability to generalize, I hope the discovery of practices and perceptions in this study will inform a broader audience of superintendents. As Creswell (2007) explained, the primary objective of qualitative research is to learn about the problem from the participants and to turn the focus of the research on the obtainment of that information.

According to Stake (2005), multiple case studies "investigate a phenomenon, population, or general condition" (p. 445). In multiple case studies, data are collected and analyzed from multiple cases (Merriam, 2009). The unit of analysis in this multiple-case study was a purposefully selected group of superintendents who are committed to pursuing their districts' visions and missions in our current environment of high-stakes testing. Therefore, instead of researching one superintendent who met the established criteria found later in this chapter, I studied three. These multiple cases consist "of a 'whole' study, in which convergent evidence is sought regarding the facts and conclusions for the case" (Yin, 2014, p. 59).

<div align="center">**Research Methods**</div>

Participants

Participant selection for this study was purposeful. Ravitch and Carl (2016) described purposeful sampling as one that "provides context-rich and detailed accounts of

specific populations and locations" (p. 128). Of the 1,247 superintendents in the State of Texas, 3 superintendents were purposefully selected due to their ability to meet the criteria I have identified. In addition, three district stakeholders were selected from each superintendent's district to attempt to identify how the leadership practices of their respective superintendents influenced others. These participants were deliberately selected because of their "unique ability to answer the study's research questions" (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

The sampling size that I have determined for this study was three, public-school superintendents in the State of Texas. To narrow the field from the vast number of superintendents as well as identify superintendents who are pursuing their district's vision and mission while navigating the high-stakes testing environment, an expert panel was developed to recommend participants for the study. Members of this expert panel were selected based on their expertise in either the Texas public-school system or the higher education system, each of whom has a focus on educational administration. These members have a state-wide network and knowledge of superintendents and helped identify those superintendents who are navigating the high-stakes testing environment while pursuing the purpose of schools. Members of the expert panel for this study included:

- Dr. Kevin Brown – Executive Director of the Texas Association of School Administrators (TASA) and retired Texas superintendent;
- Dr. Denise Collier – Lecturer at Baylor University, Texas State University, and retired Deputy Superintendent;

- Dr. John Horn – Senior Associate of The Schlechty Center and retired Texas superintendent;

- Dr. Dawson Orr – Chair of the School of Education and Human Development at Southern Methodist University (SMU) and retired Texas superintendent; and

- Dr. Marla McGhee – Associate Professor for The College of Education at Texas Christian University (TCU) and retired Texas public school administrator.

Criteria for Participant Selection. The superintendent participants in this study needed to be currently serving in the role of superintendent of schools in the State of Texas and have served for at least 3 years in the same district. I believe that it was important to establish longevity in a district so that a fair representation of the district's culture could be examined. In addition to their current role and experience as a superintendent, each participant must have been a member of TASA's Future Ready Superintendents Leadership Institute. Membership in this network helped pinpoint those superintendents who are specifically attempting to both guide their district toward the expressed purpose of schools and successfully navigate the high-stakes testing environment. The ideal superintendent participant should:

- be currently serving as superintendent of a school district in the State of Texas and been in that same role for at least three years;

- be currently a member of TASA's Future Ready Superintendents Leadership Institute; and

- be recommended by the expert panel as a superintendent who is successfully navigating the high-stakes testing environment and pursuing their district's vision and mission.

The expert panel was asked to narrow the list of qualified participants by using the following criteria:

- one recommended superintendent leading a 1A, 2A or 3A school district;

- one recommended superintendent leading a 4A, 5A, or 6A school district;

- one recommended superintendent leading a school where at least 40% of students are on free or reduced lunch; and

- according to the expert panel member, all recommended superintendents displayed success in leading their district toward the vision and mission of the school district while simultaneously navigating the high-stakes testing environment.

In addition to the superintendents who match the above criteria, three other participants from each of the superintendent's district were also selected for participation. For practical and logistical considerations, these individuals were chosen by the superintendent and included:

- one participant who is a current central office administrator in the district in which the superintendent serves;

- one participant who is a current campus administrator in the district in which the superintendent serves; and

- one participant who is a current school board member in the district in which the superintendent serves.

The intent of selecting these additional district stakeholders was to examine the influence of the superintendent's practices and confirm the superintendent's description of self-reported behaviors from a variety of perspectives.

Data Collection

Upon advancement to candidacy, and approval from the Institutional Review Board, the expert panel was formed and asked to solicit nominations. Participants were emailed asking for their participation (see Appendix B). Consent forms (see Appendix C) were obtained from the participating superintendents. The data collected for this research were in the form of interviews and reviewed documents.

Interviews. Yin (2014) noted that interviews are commonly found in case studies and are "one of the most important sources" for research data (p. 110). By using interviews, I was able to, as Patton (2002) described, understand the perspective of the selected participants. Via my proposed research perspective, I attempted to discover how superintendents make meaning of their decisions to employ certain practices over others and how these decisions impact team members. Using interviews allowed me to ". . . understand how participants make sense of and construct reality in relation to the phenomenon, events, engagements, or experience in focus; and explore how individuals; experiences and perspective relate to other study participants. . ." (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 146).

A total of four interviews took place per superintendent group. The interview of the superintendent participants took place in person and lasted approximately one hour. In these superintendent interviews, I attempted to uncover the leadership practices used to move the district in the direction of its mission and vision while also navigating the high-stakes testing environment. Following the interview of the superintendent, I interviewed the three secondary participants, individually, either in person or video conferencing. Those interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes each with an attempt to determine how

the practices the superintendent described in the previous interview are perceived by the

district stakeholder. In addition, I aimed to uncover the influences these practices have

had on the stakeholder. A total of twelve interviews were conducted by the conclusion of

this research.

For each interview, I decided to utilize, as Merriam (2009) discussed, a semi-

structured interview technique with structured questions. This format allowed me to

form guiding questions while still having the flexibility to "respond to the situation at

hand" (Merriam, 2009, p. 90). Interview questions for the superintendent participants

inquired how they think about their leadership, the high-stakes testing environment, and

the role of the superintendent in this environment. A complete list of interview questions

for superintendent participants can be found in Appendix D. Interview questions for the

three district stakeholder participants garnered their perceptions of the district's

superintendent leadership including how they perceived the superintendent's

prioritization of high-stakes testing, as well as how this prioritization has affected their

role. A complete list of interview questions for the district stakeholders can be found in

Appendices E and F.

Document Review. Data were also collected in the form of documents. Merriam

(2009) noted that documents are a form of communication and "a ready-made source of

data easily accessible to the imaginative and resourceful investigator" (p. 139). Patton

(2015) found that reviewing existing and relevant documents is an essential component

for any data collection. "These existing documents are often an important source of

context and history that can help us, as researchers, understand the complexities of what

we study better by providing a form of data triangulation to first-person accounts"
(Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 171).

For the purposes of this research, I collected district-level guiding documents that codified the district's aspirations such as the district's vision, mission, and goals, copies of the district's strategic plan, and professional development agendas. Much of this information was requested and obtained from the superintendent prior to the interviews. Other additional documents offered by the contributing superintendents or district stakeholders were considered.

Data Analysis

Once the documents were collected and the interviews were completed and transcribed, I began the process of organizing the data and analyzing for patterns or significant themes with the goal of making sense of the information. Creswell and Creswell (2018) described qualitative data analysis as a process consisting of preparing and organizing the data; reading through and looking at the data, reducing the data into themes through the use of coding; and finally, presenting the data through discussion, figures, or tables. An essential beginning step in case study research is to bring all the data together in an organized fashion (Merriam, 2009). This is a process referred to as creating the "case record" (Patton, 2002, p. 449). Once the case record was developed, a coding process was used to sort and organize the data into recurring categories or themes (Merriam, 2009). Quite simply, "Coding is a process of assigning meaning to data" (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 248).

The approach that I took to analyze the data was a dual coding process of open and axial coding. Open coding was initially used to highlight and label the text creating

themes or codes which are relevant to or answer the research questions (Merriam, 2009; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Once the open coding process was complete, which took multiple rounds, axial coding followed. Ravitch and Carl (2016) described axial coding as a process of categorizing the codes established from open coding. They explained how the transition from open to axial coding occurs, describing it as:

> a process of going from coding chunks of data to starting to see how these codes come together into coding categories or clusters from which you will situate sets of constructs or concepts in relation to each other to make arguments and develop findings. (p. 250)

With grounded theory research, information comes from the data, hence open and axial coding. Yin (2016) explained the concept in greater depth, stating, "The procedures assign various kinds of codes to the data, each code representing a concept or abstraction of potential interest" (p. 138). He found that this type of coding is relevant to all case study research, especially grounded theory studies.

A common form of analysis in qualitative research, and one that I utilized, is a constant comparative method (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). This method of data analysis compares collected data with the intent of determining similarities and differences via patterns (Merriam, 2009). Throughout the study, as I continually compared categories and themes derived from case record, I was able to look for and identify models, concepts, and theories that are grounded in the data.

Member Checking. According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), "Validity, in qualitative research, refers to the ways that researcher can affirm that their findings are faithful to the participants' experiences" (p. 186). Although creating a case record and

coding data via open and axial coding will generate themes and categories to help form

conclusions, the validity of those conclusions could be considered subjective and biased.

While validity in qualitative research cannot be completely ensured, using a structured

process can help a researcher move closer to the obtainment of that goal (Cho & Trent,

2006). For this study, I used the process of member checking to work toward validity.

Merriam (2009) defined member checking as the procedure of soliciting feedback

from the participants who are interviewed. She explained that findings and analysis of

the data collected by the researcher are provided back to the participant(s) to check if the

researcher's interpretation is true. Maxwell (2005) found that member checking,

> is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting
>
> the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on
>
> what is going on, as well as being an important way of identifying your own
>
> biases and misunderstanding of what you observed. (p. 111)

The process of member checking was done once the interviews were complete.

Each participant was provided the interview's transcript to not only review the transcript

for accuracy, but to also allow each participant the opportunity to add or clarify

information they believe is pertinent to the study. Additionally, participants were given a

checklist of key findings resulting from the interview and from the coding process.

Participants were asked to place a check by each finding with which they agree. By

doing so, this process allowed the participant to check the accuracy of the transcript and

key findings and correct any inaccurate representations of their words (Marshall &

Rossman, 2011).

IV. FINDINGS

In this chapter, I answer the study's two research questions using information collected through interviews of three superintendents, three central office administrators, three campus administrators, and three school board members, as well as district documents shared by each superintendent. Specifically, the study was guided by the following research questions:

Q1: What perceived leadership practices does a superintendent engage in to pursue the district's mission and vision in an environment of high-stakes testing with

- central office administrators;
- campus administrators; and
- school board members?

Q2: How are the leadership practices of the superintendent, in relation to the districts' mission and vision in an environment of high-stakes testing, perceived by

- central office administrators;
- campus administrators; and
- school board members?

Superintendents' Profile

The three superintendents chosen for this study were purposefully selected as they met the established criteria described fully in Chapter Three. An expert panel was convened to offer nominations of superintendents they perceived to be successfully pursuing their district's vision and mission. Additionally, nominated superintendents must have served as a superintendent of schools in the same Texas public school district for the last three years and be a member of TASA's Future Ready Superintendent's

Leadership Institute. The expert panel was asked to select participants from various

district sizes that included one participant that led a school district with at least 40% free

or reduced lunch. After taking suggestions from the expert panel, nominated

superintendents were emailed specifics about their potential involvement in this study,

which included an interview, interviews of district stakeholders, collection of district

documents, and member-checking of their interview transcript. The email sent to each

nominated superintendent is provided in Appendix F. Three superintendents responded

and agreed to participate in the study. The superintendents who participated, one White

female and two White males, led school districts of various sizes and demographics.

District sizes range from 105 to 2,189 students with between 29% and 48% of the

students qualifying for free or reduced lunch. Superintendent participants in the study

have between 6 and 31 consecutive years of superintendent service.

A total of 12 individual interviews were conducted across the 3 school districts.

The interviews included one with each superintendent, as well as one with an assistant

superintendent, a campus principal, and a school board member from each district. The

interviews of the superintendents took place at the district of each participating

superintendent and lasted 45-60 minutes. All interviews of central office and campus

administrators, as well as board members, took place in the district, except for two that

were done via phone call. To protect the anonymity of the participants and the school

districts involved in this study, each was given a correlating pseudonym of "A," "B," and

"C." For further anonymity, the vision and mission of the school districts will not be

divulged. Table 1 specifies the role of each stakeholder interviewed from each district:

Table 1

Participants involved in the study, by district.

District "A"	District "B"	District "C"
Superintendent	Superintendent	Superintendent
Assistant Superintendent	Assistant Superintendent	Assistant Superintendent
Elementary Principal	High School Principal	High School Principal
Board Member	Board Member	Board Member

In addition, approximately 165 individual documents were received and reviewed. The documents included strategic plans, newsletters, state of the district reports, district scorecards, as well as agendas from professional development sessions, board meetings, and presentations at conferences.

Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and organized into a case record. The case record was subsequently coded via multiple rounds of open coding and then followed by multiple rounds of axial coding. Finally, data obtained via interviews and the collected documents were triangulated using constant comparative analysis to determine consistent themes within the research (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2014). The following sections describe the findings from the research.

Research Question 1: Leadership Practices Perceived by the Superintendent

Data regarding how superintendent participants pursue their district's vision and mission in the environment of high-stakes testing were identified in the study. Each superintendent participant expressed the importance of their district's mission and vision and of the pursuit and achievement of that mission and vision. In addition, each superintendent discussed the impact the high-stakes testing environment has had on their school district and their leadership. While the first two subsections of this research

question asked about the leadership practices of the superintendent with central office administrators and campus administrators, findings revealed that superintendents used similar leadership practices with all stakeholders, regardless of their role. However, some of the leadership practices were more prevalent and evident with administrators than board members. The following leadership practices of the superintendent were discovered: 1) mitigating pressures associated with high-stakes testing, 2) emphasizing professional learning, 3) networking with other leaders, 4) developing a community-based accountability system, 5) communicating vision and mission with stakeholders, and 6) building community trust.

Mitigating Pressures Associated with High-Stakes Testing

In speaking with each superintendent, it became evident that the high-stakes testing environment was a significant factor in their work. Each superintendent discussed the high-stakes testing environment and how it had impacted their role. One superintendent described the high-stakes testing environment as "an ever-present menace." Another described the environment as "a hammer" over one's head as he tried to pursue what he, as an educator, believed is right. The third superintendent responded that the environment "is difficult to get away from" due to the accountability measures the state places on schools and districts.

Even with the pressures associated with the current testing environment, including pressures on teachers, students, administrators, and the community, all three superintendents discussed how they intentionally focused on mitigating the negative impacts that are associated with high-stakes testing. Specifically, these superintendents

do not discuss the results of the STAAR exam with their staff and community. Said one superintendent:

> We don't talk about it. We spend a lot of time with teachers at the first of the year and throughout the year, and they've never heard me say it. I don't know if I've ever mentioned the word STAAR to my teachers.

Echoed another superintendent, "It's not even discussed. We do not live and breathe the STAAR." When asked how much they focused on high-stakes testing, one superintendent responded emphatically with, "None. None." He went on to explain his reasoning, "If you promote high-stakes testing, then you strip the passion of learning. You strip that not only from your teachers but mainly your students. They're not going to be passionate."

While intentionally not discussing the STAAR test or results with their staff and community, the pressures associated with high-stakes testing remain. One superintendent described the high-stakes testing environment she inherited when beginning the job as superintendent in her current school district:

> We had traditionally been high-performing on the high-stakes assessment. We still are, to a degree, not quite like it was. But a lot of things have happened. It had been an emphasis like it was in most districts. Rewards, big financial rewards were given when we hit exemplary before I came. The banners, the celebration, all of that, it was very high-stakes environment.

When asked if the banners noting exemplary achievement on high-stakes tests were still hanging in the district, this superintendent responded with, "No banners." She had them all taken down.

However, the superintendent participants have not always practiced reducing the attention paid to high-stakes testing in their leadership. "When I first became a superintendent, high-stakes testing and test results were everything to me," said Superintendent B. Another superintendent echoed how she also had focused on testing early in her career, "My first two years, we celebrated" when referring to the results of the STAAR assessment. That transformation of removing the focus on high-stakes testing evolved when a greater charge became clear to these leaders. Said one superintendent:

> When I realized that the bigger goal was about preparing students and preparing students for life and understanding that where I am today wasn't because I passed a state assessment or performed well. It's because I was provided opportunities and experiences to be where I am today. Now it's not even discussed.

Even as these superintendents intentionally focus on reducing the pressures associated with the high-stakes testing environment, they understood that they were still held accountable for their student's performance on STAAR. Said Superintendent A:

> We make sure that we are not about the STAAR, but in the same respect, it is a reality that our kids have to take it. When you're talking about ratings, grade letters, I don't want it to be a thing, but in the same respect, I want to protect the integrity of my community. It's that constant pull.

Another superintendent described the competitive nature associated with the high-stakes testing environment that keeps the pressure alive:

> Sometimes it's difficult to get away from it because of the A-F accountability system. We all know we live in a very competitive area. We don't want to be a C

school district and [our neighboring schools] are an A. It just wouldn't look good for us.

Collected documents verified the superintendent's lack of emphasis placed on high-stakes testing. Multiple agendas showed no indication of conversations regarding STAAR testing, results, or state accountability measures. One superintendent had written a two-page newsletter to her community, indicating several primary reasons high-stakes testing, and the A-F accountability system was not good for their district and their students.

Prioritizing Vision and Mission. While each superintendent intentionally worked to remove the pressures associated with the high-stakes testing environment, the importance of pursuing the school district's vision and mission was their priority. For example, Superintendent B noted the backbone of their school district's vision:

When it comes to the vision, one of the things that really hits home for me is that at the end of the day, it's all about students. So, when we talk about vision, and we talk about mission, it's about really laying the groundwork and making sure we're focused on that one major 'why,' and that's students.

Superintendent C agreed that his pursuit centers around students:

The system that we're in was basically designed for the haves by the haves. And that's why we need to rethink a system that, it doesn't really matter where you come from, where do you want to go. And then we need to put the support structures in place for all students. That all should be capitalized because that's a little bit what's missing, or what has been. Because students can't help where they come from. But where do you want to go?

Superintendent A expressed her passion for her school district's vision and mission, one that pursues an "an exceptional school system" and "develops great people to better the world." She said:

> We believe that we're giving an exceptional education in every aspect, not only in math but in character development and everything else too. Then, we're going to challenge them to exceed their own expectations, that's one thing [Suburb ISD] is known for, is that on paper it looks like we should perform this way. In our sports teams, we may not be the biggest, the tallest, but we are going to be the hardest working, well-disciplined, well-coached team until we're always going to exceed expectations. That provides a foundation for success in life. This is not just a K-12 journey; this is setting them up to be successful.

Emphasizing Professional Learning

A second key leadership practice—that of creating a culture of professional learning—was evident in these districts. This focus on continuous learning was a way to orient people and efforts toward the mission and vision. From the allocation of resources to the time and urgency placed on learning, each superintendent discussed the importance of adult learning as it pertained to the pursuit of the vision and mission. Said Superintendent C:

> Professional learning is key in this organization. We can't be stagnant. The old saying is, 'You either get better, or you get worse; you can't stay the same.' So, it's our job as leaders in this organization to provide experiences for not only kids but for adults and also community members; to bring everyone together.

When asked what type of professional learning he was referring to, he responded, "We spend a lot of time trying to provide learning that is relevant to the mission and vision."

Superintendent B discussed how he utilized professional learning in their school district:

> We spend a lot of time talking about what students need in the future and what skills are necessary for them to be successful in career and in life or at the university level. When we build professional learning, we built it with that in mind. We really try to make professional learning fun. It's not 'sit and get.' We spend a lot of time designing it, and we spend a lot of time preparing for that particular day.

When asked about the primary focus of professional learning, Superintendent B responded similarly to Superintendent C, "We spend a lot of time trying to provide learning that is relevant to the mission and the vision, but also relevant to the strategic plan."

Specifically, Superintendent A discussed book studies with her leadership team of central office staff and campus principals. The importance of these books "focused on the things that we want to be about: voice, choice, taking risks, and innovation. That's what we want our classrooms to be about." She went on to add that she wanted to ensure "that the things that we are talking about are reflective of our beliefs and where we want to go as a district."

In Superintendent C's district, staff can earn "badges" through professional learning to become a "lead learner" in their school district. While these badges allow staff to achieve a certain level of learning that "connect students to one another and the

world" or provide "learning that goes beyond paper and pencil work and has a lasting impact on students and the community," none of the professional development was associated with improving test scores. Likewise, professional learning documents from the other two districts did not include any reference to STAAR testing.

Networking with Other Leaders

Each superintendent in this study acknowledged their involvement in networking with other leaders and how those connections played an essential role in their leadership. "I've spent a lot of time, personally, in conversations with people," said Superintendent C. Superintendent A described the process for how she got involved in networking with other superintendents and the impact it had on her:

Another superintendent had recommended me to become part of the Future-Ready Superintendents Leadership Network. For the first time, I went from my just kind of county meetings and regional committees that I was on to being surrounded by a group of superintendents who were pushing the envelope in every respect possible; in their buildings, in their curriculum, in their instruction, in how they were using technology, in absolutely everything. My head was spinning.

From these networking opportunities, Superintendent A provided an example of how networking has helped her re-prioritize high-stakes testing:

I've gotten to know quite a few people that are doing great work. One of those is 'Joe' in 'Big City ISD.' Joe shared the story that if you want to see an unbelievable report on local accountability, Big City ISD has amazing ones, and they have for a long time. But he shared that in one of his first renditions, STAAR was on page three. Like, welcome, table of contents, academic report,

and here's STAAR. He said, in our most recent ones, it's on page 67, in the very

back.

In her most recent State of Schools report, STAAR was on page 6, half-way through the

document.

Developing a Community-Based Accountability System

All three superintendents discussed how they aimed to identify goals and

measurements of goals associated with their district's vision and mission. A community-

based accountability system (CBAS) has been developed by all three of the

superintendent participant's districts in contrast to the state's A-F accountability system.

A CBAS, as described by TASA (2019), is a system that is:

- locally developed and shows evidence of student learning;

- strategically customized to measure student achievement; and

- rigorously descriptive reporting to parents and community members (para. 3).

Tanner (2016) described a CBAS as a system that repositions the accountability of a

school district from the state to the community that the district serves. Tanner (2016)

further expressed the need for a CBAS within a school district, saying that

> . . . a proper CBAS would add tremendous richness to the educational enterprise
>
> rather than water it down. It transfers the most meaningful accountability from
>
> the state compliance requirement that is far removed from actual learning, both in
>
> the measures selected and in their translation into judgments of quality, to the
>
> communities where learning actually occurs. It requires true leadership by
>
> superintendents, principals, and teachers to make public their understandings of

what each is accountable for and to whom, and to then accept that accountability

as their own. (p. 5)

Each superintendent discussed the importance of his or her CBAS and what they

do in order to develop action steps toward their mission and vision. Said Superintendent

C of his CBAS:

Our focus is on three things. College degree, symbolic of college readiness,

STEM [Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math] certification, symbolic of

workforce readiness, and student research, symbolic of lifetime learning, to

prepare students in the 21st century for jobs and careers that don't exist today.

And that's our community-based accountability system.

Another superintendent discussed how they communicated their CBAS to their

community:

We spend a lot of time with our community through our community-based

accountability. We always send out our report the day before A-F ratings came

out. We sent out our community-based scorecard, which was developed by our

community and had 25 indicators that said, 'These are the things that are

important to us.' We surveyed our staff and our parents. STAAR testing didn't

even make the top 50.

In order to meet the goals and objectives identified in the CBAS, each district

developed a plan for moving action forward, which all three superintendents described as

a strategic plan. A strategic plan, according to the National Research Council (1999), is a

plan that improves educational outcomes by focusing on a small set of highly important

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issues that are developed through a collaborative design effort. Superintendent A discussed her district's strategic plan and what it entails:

> You'll note our objectives aren't the traditional human resources and finance. I just was very clear that if this is our strategic plan of where we want to be in the next five to ten years, then everything has to push the envelope. Areas like innovative learning, be future-ready, and social and emotional health.

> District B's strategic plan included items such as, "cultivate an innovative environment to foster student ownership," "provide multiple sources of academic content, real-world connections, adaptive tools, and access to timely data to customize instruction for groups of students or individuals," and "develop a learner profile that reflects community-based accountability in order for the district to evaluate and adjust programs" were found. Nowhere in any of the strategic plans collected was a mention of increasing STAAR scores or accountability ratings.

Communicating Vision and Mission with Stakeholders

Throughout the interviews and within the documents collected, evidence was found for all three superintendents communicating how they are pursuing their district's vision and mission with their respective stakeholders. Many forms of communication were discovered. However, communication between the superintendent and stakeholders was not one way, and none of the communication emphasized improving test scores. All three superintendents discussed an open communication system in which they engaged with their stakeholders and received feedback. For example, one superintendent stated, "We survey our community a lot, and we ask for their input." Another noted how he hosted "educational summits" to gather feedback that led toward the creation of his

district's strategic plan. Another described her experience in the communication process when creating her district's strategic plan:

> We had over 300 people involved, which for our community, that's a lot of people. We did everything from the big state of the school/community forum where I shared a little bit of data and then asked for feedback and allowed them time to just give me comments. Shared a little bit more information then asked for feedback and collected all of that. We did community surveys. I did surveys for my alumni and just listened to their feedback on what they wished their experience was like. We did student roundtables, everything you could imagine to get a lot of information.

After the plan was created, she began to communicate the plan's purpose and goals with her leadership team of central office staff and principals. "We talk about community-based accountability. We talk about learner profiles. We talk about strategic planning. We talk about professional learning. But when we do it, none of that is in STAAR testing or high-stakes testing embedded." She went on to add that because of this focus, their leadership team has created a new culture in her district, one that is not centered around high-stakes testing. She said, "I think it's a culture. If your culture is built around certain things that will not allow strategies and your vision and mission to be successful, then you've got the wrong culture."

Superintendent B discussed how he used multiple committees to help "tell the story of the district:"

> We have a Community Advisory Council that's made up of 55 community members. We have a master facility committee that's made up of 25 or 30.

Through strategic planning, we probably included 125 community members to

help with that year-long process. We have [School Health Advisory Council]

committees, I mean, you name it. The number of committees that we have, every

time we have a group in front of us, we try to tell our story.

He went on to express the importance of how his communication, coupled with the focus

on professional learning, impacts campus leaders:

This is where we work strongly with our principals. We spend a lot of time

coaching them to look for certain things. We want them to be the lead learners on

their campuses. We want them to be in PLCs [Professional Learning

Communities] and have the conversation about what they are learning and what

new strategies could be impactful for students.

Later in the interview, he went on to add the purpose of communicating effectively by

stating, "It's our job as leaders in this organization to provide experiences for not only

kids but for adults and community members to bring everyone together."

In the review of documents, communication tools such as "State of School"

mailouts were found as well as a "Community Report," and a "District Scorecard."

When asked under what conditions these documents are shared with their respective

communities, Superintendents A and B noted these documents are sent to all stakeholders

toward the end of each school year with the purpose of updating the community on

progress toward goals associated with their district's vision and mission.

Media communication, such as video messages was also discovered. The

messages, according to the superintendent, aimed at updating the community on the

progression and obtainment of goals, all leading toward his district's mission and vision.

Two of the three superintendents were discovered to be active on social media using those platforms to identify and celebrate stories in their district as they relate to their district's vision and mission. What was not found, throughout the interviews conducted and documents collected, was communication associated with improving STAAR results. In fact, one superintendent described how the students in their district are much more than test scores. In his "Community Report" he noted:

> Public schools are many times marked solely on test scores mandated by the state. As educators, we know that our children are so much more than the outcome of a few testing days in the year. This report is designed to share who we are as a district and the ways that we are working to be the very best we can be for [District B ISD] students!

A leadership practice that each superintendent discussed in depth was communication with his or her board of trustees. Specifically, each superintendent stated that updating board members about progress towards the district's vision and mission was a high priority. Said one superintendent regarding communicating with his board at meetings, "We talk about student outcomes in our three focus areas in every meeting. And, that's 90% of every meeting. There is not room on the agenda for things that are not about student outcomes." Another superintendent commented, "We give an update on our strategic plan every single board meeting." Board workshops have also been utilized by these superintendents with the purpose, as one superintendent described, "to focus on what it is that [our district] wants to be about." In reviewing the documents collected, agendas from board meetings verified the absence of discussion and action items pertaining to high-stakes testing.

One superintendent discussed her transition from the influences of the high-stakes testing environment to an environment focusing on pursuing their vision and mission in their communication to the board, saying, "My first year as a superintendent, the minute I got STAAR scores, I was calling board members." This superintendent has reprioritized where high-stakes testing now falls when communicating with board members and in board meetings, explaining, "I began to understand that if STAAR becomes the focal point at board meetings, then teachers are going to understand that." For example, Superintendent A did not present district STAAR results from the previous year to board members until the state required hearing in January.

Building Community Trust

A leadership practice that all superintendents discussed and described with both praise and caution was the importance placed on building trust within the community they served. Said Superintendent B:

> Everything starts with trust, and it starts with being part of the community. I've immersed myself in this community, and I think all good superintendents do. You're the face of that district, and you need to be out and about shaking hands and having conversations with people; going to Rotary and Chamber and anywhere more than three or four [people] gather.

Because of the efforts placed on building trust throughout the community, one superintendent stated that he believed, over time, the community will begin to realize the "success out of strategic planning, and they see student success."

The importance of community involvement, or not getting involved, was described by Superintendent C with a word of caution:

Every district is different, and a superintendent can go into a district with an
agenda that could really elevate student outcomes, but yet you understand that
there's a culture there, and you better learn that culture, and you better figure out
who the power structure is. And a lot of times that's not the guys sitting on the
board; that's the guys that decide who sits on the board. And if you're trying to
do something that they don't support, they're going to kill you.

Research Question 2: Perceptions of Leadership Practices of the Superintendent

In the interviews of administrators and board members, questions were asked
regarding the perceived leadership practices of their superintendent of schools. Again,
the perceptions of all three stakeholder groups were similar, though with more variation
for board members. The perceived leadership practices by the superintendent were: 1)
vision and mission driven, 2) creates action steps toward vision and mission attainment,
3) models vision and mission, 4) communicates vision and mission to stakeholders, 5)
empowers others to lead, 6) holds leaders accountable, and 7) focuses on culture.

Vision and Mission Driven

Unanimously, all participants interviewed reported that their superintendent
focused attention on the vision and mission of the school district. One central office
administrator described her superintendent as "singly focused" on the district's vision and
mission with every group that he encounters. "We don't do anything that doesn't support
that vision and mission statement. It guides everything we do," she said. In the same
district, the high school principal noted his superintendent "does a good job of
continually communicating the why" behind the vision and mission. Because of that
focus on the why, the principal decided to "stay aligned" with their district's vision and

not create a separate campus vision and mission statement. "A lot of school districts, it's separate," referring to the vision and mission statement. "Our vision keeps us focused on what's important," he said. Examination of documents from the high school provided evidence of the principal's purposeful alignment of the school vision to the district vision.

Even in times of stress or crisis, administrators responded that there is no change in the superintendent's focus. In an instance in which a principal's school received less than favorable STAAR scores, the superintendent responded with a continual focus on vision and mission work. "That was a moment in time that really stood out for me," said the principal. He continued:

His focus was still on the bigger picture. I think there's a great temptation to fall into, 'Yeah, I like the positive things you're doing for kids, but gosh, I want to wag a finger at you and talk to you about how this isn't acceptable.' I have friends all over the state, and I know that's what happens, and that's not been my experience with him as a superintendent. He continues to focus on a bigger picture, and he still wants to focus on the positive things that are taking place. That doesn't mean he has his head in the sand, but I think he's more willing to step back and say, 'If this is our vision, then I'm going to need to look at a bigger chunk of time, and if this is what we're trying to accomplish, can I still look at the steps that support that mission and see actionable steps towards that mission, then I am going to give you the benefit of the doubt and let's revisit this in a year, two years, four years, and I know that ultimately, we're going to get to where we want to get.'

In this instance, the campus principal explained that because of, as he described, the lack of "overreaction" by the superintendent, he was able to fully realize the importance placed on vision and mission attainment. "That to me is something that's really important. People who I believe aren't true to a vision overreact, and that vision is constantly jutting one way or another," he said.

Several school board members discussed how their superintendent was focused on the vision of the school district. Said one board member, "he sells the vision to us all the time, over and over." Another trustee pointed out that, speaking for her entire board, they did not know they needed a focus on vision until this superintendent's leadership. "We never would have had this until she suggested it." Because of the focus on working toward the district's vision and mission, one board member responded emphatically with, "This is my favorite thing. Our vision. This is my favorite part of being on the board."

Creates Action Steps Toward Vision and Mission Attainment.

A focus on the vision and mission and selling its purpose were not the only superintendent leadership practices described by the stakeholders interviewed. Action steps led by the superintendent toward achieving their district's vision and mission were also identified. Specifically, each group of central office administrators and campus administrators spoke of their district's strategic plan and how the superintendent has used that document to pursue the vision and mission of the district. Said one campus principal:

> He keeps that strategic plan at the forefront of what we're doing so that we don't
> lose sight of this. It is the really important work that we're doing, even though all

of these other compliance things have to happen. This is the important work we are doing.

In another district, a central office administrator echoed the importance of their strategic plan. "For me, this is our road map," he said. "It's a collaboration of not just educators in our district but campus leaders, board members, community members, and even students on the direction we need to go and to assess the things we do really well as a district."

Because of the work superintendents put in to strive toward the district's vision and mission through a plan of action, interviewees perceived specific decisions as aligning action with purpose. In one school district, a bond was called, voted on, and passed by the voters to build a new high school, which aligned the district's visioning work to create a facility designed and built to support that work. The principal of the building noted the focus on the vision and pointed back to the leadership of the superintendent, saying, "I give him a ton of credit."

In School District B, a campus principal described examples such as how meeting agendas and conversations that were held with the superintendent all focused on the district's plan of action, which aligned with the district's vision and mission. Agendas collected during the document review verified many meetings and conversations regarding the district' plan. None of the agendas contained information regarding STAAR testing or scores. The principal specifically mentioned how their high school had changed their bell schedule and noted the adjustment was made through conversations with the superintendent regarding their vision and mission. "It didn't have anything to do with state testing," he said. "It had to do with creating more teacher

retention and trying to create more satisfied employees. It advocated for how we can better serve the kids and serve the teachers."

An assistant superintendent praised the action steps of her superintendent toward supporting their district's vision and mission. "He is the epitome of what a superintendent ought to do. Everything is about that mission of empowering students and giving them the opportunity to develop what their passion is," she said. She went on to provide an example of how the superintendent pursues the district's vision and mission:

He finds the money for things that aren't traditionally in a school district. If we have a STEM initiative and we really think that's important and that's what jobs in our community are going to do, then he finds ways to help us fund the professional development and the materials and supplies for kids to do those kinds of things.

Models Vision and Mission

Serving as a role model was another key superintendent leadership practice perceived by central office and campus administrators. One campus principal described his superintendent as "leading the way" through his daily activities. Another central office administrator provided more detailed examples of how their superintendent role models, noting:

He is very involved. He visits campuses every week. He opens car doors in the morning. He goes to student's special events. He's at night events. He is living that mission with our staff and with our students. So much so that he probably knows more kids in the school district than anybody else.

Because of this perception of role modeling the vision and mission by the superintendent, one high school principal has been influenced to do the same with his staff. He noted:

> For me specifically, it's been trying to be a better role model to other administrators on my campus as far as being involved in PLC's and saying, 'If you want to come and look at how we review data and things like that. I want to make sure the kids are given the opportunity to be successful on something that is an obstacle they have to get over.

Communicates Vision and Mission to Stakeholders

Communication was another key superintendent leadership practice mentioned by the administrators and board members interviewed for this study. Said one assistant superintendent of their superintendent, "She does a lot of communication; very effective communication, with our community, our parents, and our board members." An example, found in the document review, was a letter to the community that Superintendent A serves. In the letter to the community, the superintendent detailed why the A-F accountability system was wrong for public education and their district. "There are SO many reasons why this [A-F accountability] is not good for districts or schools," Superintendent A wrote, ". . .but the most critical one is that this is not good for KIDS!"

Throughout the interviews and across districts, communication was echoed as an essential leadership practice of the superintendent. "He communicates well," said one board member of their superintendent. "He addresses our faculty every Friday to give them an update on what's going on, what we're looking at, and what's taking place this week," said an assistant superintendent. In another district, an assistant superintendent

provided an example of how their superintendent received feedback and then communicated the district's vision and mission in the environment of high-stakes testing:

> We do a community engagement survey. We do that so they know we care about what do you want the schools to be for your children. Then, we report that back through a report; how are we doing on those things, so it's just not state testing. It's what does our community want for our children and how are we accomplishing those things. He's putting that mission out there to our community.

Not only did these participants acknowledge the communication ability of the superintendent as an important leadership practice, but the message from the superintendent never changed. Said one campus principal, "He's a good communicator but more than anything, he is a consistent communicator, and he gets that message out often and consistently." Another board member acknowledged consistency when referring to the superintendent's relentless pursuit of the district's vision and mission, saying, "He communicates that drive repetitively."

All three groups, i.e., central office administrators, campus principals, and board members, identified consistent communication from the superintendent to the board regarding action toward the vision and mission. For one school district, an assistant superintendent described quarterly reports to the board of trustees from the superintendent and staff members. She said that because of these reports:

> They're able to see what has taken place over the last three months that's moving us toward our vision, and then typically, we're asked to speak to one or two things that might be standouts that happened during that time.

She went on to add, "He does a great job explaining, empowering, and embodying that mission with our school board." In much the same manner, another central office administrator described his superintendent's communication to the board, stating, "Every board meeting, there is an item on the agenda that has to do with this document [strategic plan]. He followed up and explained that because of this communication, the district's school board has become "very supportive" of the work they are undertaking. Board agendas collected verified discussion items regarding the district strategic plan.

In one school district, a campus principal described his perceptions of the superintendent's work with the board of trustees. "He has influenced the board, but over time. He leads them and influences them and their thinking every month when he talks about what we're doing," he said. Because of that influence over time, the campus principal noted that the vision of the superintendent "has become the vision of the board."

Empowers Others to Lead

Throughout the interviews, multiple administrators and board members commented on their superintendent's empowerment of others. Whether it was the empowerment of the interviewees themselves as a leader or empowerment of other staff members, these participants perceived that empowerment of others to lead was a top practice displayed by their superintendent. For example, a board member in Superintendent A's school district described her superintendent as, "Very intelligent. She's a good leader. She's the type that will just plant the seed, put a little fertilizer on it, and then sit back and just let other people water it and tend to it." That same board member described Superintendent A's work with the board in the same manner regarding the development of their strategic plan, saying, "Oh she's the one that initiated it. Then

she sits back and lets us do it." When the board would ask the superintendent about her thoughts, the board member said, "She'd go, 'I like it.' But then she's confident enough to send it to the administrators, and send it to the teachers, and let everybody fine tune it."

Similar to the board member's description, a central office administrator noted of the superintendent, "That's one of the gifts that she has as a leader is setting the parameters; stepping back and letting people do their job and supporting them along the way," he said. An example that characterized the empowerment of others, by the superintendent, was provided when referring to the work of the district's strategic planning committee. "She let the committee steer our direction," he said and noted that she "was very careful with her leadership and input of not trying to steer it from the perspective of the administration or school board."

In School District B, the campus principal described his superintendent as one that empowers others. "He lives that," said the principal and called his perception of the superintendent building capacity in others as "one of his [the superintendent's] strengths." He added:

> I think that really allows us to approach things in a more reasonable manner. I think that when you are in a pressure cooker negatively, I don't think that people do their best work. I think that's all a part of him living out that vision.

Holds Leaders Accountable

While each superintendent was described as one who created action steps toward supporting vision and mission attainment, accountability toward that attainment was explicitly mentioned by central office administrators. A central office administrator from

School District B described the process each department in her district goes through to provide the superintendent with evidence of accountability:

> He does a great job structuring our accountability. By that, I mean every quarter we submit a review of what happened in those three months. All of the departments here in the school district. Every three months, all of those action steps are included in that strategic plan, and I report back on each one of those steps and how we are doing.

A central office administrator from School District A described his district's process as weekly meetings to ensure that "they are all on the same page" so that they may be "constantly cognizant of the things that we want to achieve based on this document (strategic plan), that we created."

However, meetings and reports of the district's strategic plan were not the only examples of how the superintendent holds leaders accountable for vision and mission action. Influencing others is another expectation that was described by central office administrators. For example, the assistant superintendent from School District B said, "He also has an expectation for us to influence the rest of our area that we lead; including our state." She went on to add, "If you go back and look at multiple conventions, for a district our size, you will see a whole lot of presentations by us, meaning let's be a leader." Collected documents showed that School District C presented a session to a group of administrators specifically discussing how their district gathered feedback from their community to develop their strategic plan aimed at pursuing the district's vision and mission.

Focuses on Culture

The superintendents' focus on the culture of the school district was a leadership practice that was discussed by all interviewees. From board members to central office administrators, culture was brought up frequently throughout the interviews. For example, one assistant superintendent described her superintendent as "hands on" and noted that

> . . .all the staff in our district know exactly how important the success of our
> students [is] based on what her beliefs are and not in a threatening way; a very
> open, caring, open door policy way. She is very transparent with all the
> information she shares.

Because of this, he said that she has created "a very collaborative culture."

The environment of high-stakes testing was discussed as a significant factor in the development and focus on culture. As one campus principal described of his superintendent, "He will definitely talk about culture and how important culture is. I believe there are some districts that their culture is suffering in order to get high marks and high results." Another central office administrator discussed their superintendent's focus on a culture that emphasizes "joy in learning." She remarked:

> He really encapsulates what we're here to do. It's about a joy in learning. If you
> can create experiences of kids, experiences for teachers, experiences for
> communities that represent joy in learning, then to a great degree, you're getting it
> done. It will be represented in test scores in a variety of ways.

She then described an example of the importance the superintendent places on that "joy of learning." She said:

If he's going to have a problem with something, it's generally going to be when

teachers are not experiencing that high level of satisfaction; then something's

amiss because children are going to experience the adult that is in their room.

In the same district, the high school principal echoed the same perception of the

superintendent. He said:

In terms of priority, when you walk into a building, he's going to pay attention to,

'What does the climate feel like when I walk in? How are people greeted?' I will

tell you this; he has gotten on to me more about people not answering the phone

quickly, than anything to do with a bad performance on state testing. So, what

that tells you is that's customer service and customer service is climate and

climate fills culture.

When asked where he believed culture was on the superintendent's priority list, he

responded with "at the top of his list."

A campus principal commented on the work and importance his superintendent

places on culture. He said, "From a cultural standpoint, he's created an organization that

is really, really hungry." He went on to clarify:

I think that he has created an organization that has employees, at every level, that

are earnestly seeking better ways to do things; that are earnestly trying to figure

out different ways they can provide, create experiences for kids. I would say that

I think he has created an organization, a group of people, who are engaged. It

matters because it's what you do. This is your career. This is your livelihood. I

think that culturally, you have a group of teachers who are not like the

downtrodden; everybody kicks us while we're down. I feel like they puff their

chest out, and they feel like, 'I'm a teacher, and I matter because I make a difference.' I think culturally, that is something that he has built.

In another school district, a central office administrator described how the superintendent has created a culture of college readiness. For example, banners and plaques have been placed throughout the building showcasing the universities where teachers graduated. "Seeing those names of colleges from kindergarten up plants that seed in their minds of college, and it's attainability," she remarked. "[The students] are proud, and they feel like they can do something with their lives."

A board member discussed his perceptions about the shift in the culture of the school district as led by the superintendent. During this time of change, he noted that a great number of people feared the unknown, and in fact, he said, "I was scared of the unknown." He then followed with "But I was willing to say, we have got to do something here because we were shrinking in enrollment and we had to change something, so I was not opposed." Now, because of that shift in culture, the board member explained the district is "turning corners and finding new things all the time as far as giving our kids the best chance to succeed."

In School District A, the school board member discussed the superintendent's focus on culture and how "their community gelled" because of this focus. She described the superintendent's leadership as "changing mindsets," and because of that focus on culture, their board and community changed as well by moving more toward student-centered learning that was less about "We're on the board, just let us take care of school." She noted, "Now we know what [School District A] is about."

Summary

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Chapter IV has described the results of the qualitative analyses as they relate to the two research questions. Data were collected from interviews, and documents were received and reviewed. The case record was compiled, the data analyzed, and themes emerged.   Superintendent self-reported leadership practices, as well as perceived practices described by stakeholders, were reported.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

Chapter V is comprised of several sections. A summary of this study describes the research problem, the purpose of the study, the research questions posed, a synopsis of the literature associated with the study, and an overview of the methodology and results found. Next, conclusions are drawn based on the findings from the research. Connections are made between the findings and the study's conceptual framework, the Texas Superintendent Certificate Standards, and other leadership models. Implications of the study are then discussed as are recommendations for future research. Lastly, my final thoughts are shared.

Summary of the Study

Research Problem

The results of high-stakes testing in public schools are being used as the primary mechanism to hold school districts accountable for student performance (Hart & Teeter, 2004; Supovitz, 2009). Today's public school superintendents face a significant challenge of balancing the demands placed on districts and campuses by the state's mandated, high-stakes testing accountability system while simultaneously pursuing their district's vision and mission. While a vast amount of research has been conducted on the role of principal leadership in response to high-stakes testing, previous studies conducted on superintendent leadership have examined more general leadership practices (Leithwood, 1994; McFarlane, 2010; Marzano et al., 2005; Waters & Marzano, 2006). There is a lack of specific research that depicts the superintendent's leadership practices

regarding the attainment of his or her district's vision and mission while responding to the demands of the high-stakes testing environment.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to discover the leadership practices of public school superintendents in Texas who are pursuing their district's vision and mission while simultaneously responding to the demands of the high-stakes testing environment. In addition, it was also a goal of this study to explore how these superintendent leadership practices are perceived by district-level administrators, campus administrators, and school board members.

Research Questions

Two research questions were devised to examine how superintendents lead at different levels of the school district in order to navigate the high-stakes testing environment while also pursuing their district's mission and vision:

Q1: What perceived leadership practices does a superintendent engage in to pursue the district's mission and vision in an environment of high-stakes testing with

- central office administrators;
- campus administrators; and
- school board and community members?

Q2: How are the leadership practices of the superintendent, in relation to the districts' mission and vision in an environment of high-stakes testing, perceived by

- central office administrators;
- campus administrators; and
- school board and community members?

Methodology

A qualitative, multiple case study approach was used to analyze public school superintendents from the State of Texas. An expert panel was convened to offer nominations of superintendents who are actively pursuing their district vision and mission while mitigating the demands associated with the high-stakes testing environment. From these nominations, three superintendents were selected to participate in this study. In addition, three stakeholders from each of the participating superintendent's district were also selected to determine the perceptions of the superintendent's leadership practices and consisted of a central office administrator, a campus principal, and a school board member. Data were collected in the form of district documents and interviews. Once the data collection was complete, the case record was assembled and coded via multiple rounds of open coding and axial coding. A constant comparative analysis was utilized to create themes from the findings so that they could be reported in the results.

Findings

According to the data collected, superintendents described six overarching leadership practices they use to pursue their district's vision and mission within the environment of high-stakes testing. The six leadership practices discovered were: 1) mitigating pressures associated with high-stakes testing, 2) emphasizing professional learning, 3) networking with other leaders, 4) developing a community-based accountability system, 5) communicating vision and mission with stakeholders, and 6) building community trust.

Superintendents in this study intentionally worked to mitigate the pressures associated with the high-stakes testing environment that are placed on teachers, staff, students, and the district. Examples such as eliminating discussions regarding STAAR results with staff were identified along with removing banners and awards received from high-stakes testing accountability results.

These superintendents also placed a focus on the importance of their staff's professional learning. As one superintendent noted, the professional learning he employed was "learning that is relevant to the mission and vision." Networking with other leaders was revealed as another practice utilized by these superintendents. From one-on-one conversations with other leaders to the involvement in consortium groups that have the same passion and drive regarding vision and mission attainment, these superintendents constantly interacted with like-minded professionals.

The data also indicated that these superintendents intentionally developed and pursued a community-based accountability system. Within each CBAS, a strategic plan outlined how the district would pursue its vision and mission. While implementing the strategic plan, these superintendents constantly communicated their aims and actions to the community and the district's board of trustees. Finally, the findings indicated how these superintendents worked to build trust in their community.

The perceptions of the superintendents' leadership practices were also identified via collected documents and interviews with district-level administrators, campus principals, and board members from each superintendent's district. The findings indicated seven key leadership practices perceived by stakeholders including: 1) vision and mission driven, 2) creates action steps toward vision and mission attainment, 3)

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models vision and mission, 4) communicates vision and mission to stakeholders, 5) empowers others to lead, 6) holds leaders accountable, and 7) focuses on culture.

The findings revealed that each superintendent was vision and mission driven. As one administrator commented, her superintendent led work in their district that only supported the vision and mission of the district. That work involved action steps toward vision and mission attainment and holding leaders accountable for results.

Much like the superintendent participants, central office administrators, campus principals, and board members all acknowledged the importance of their district's strategic plan and how those action items have led toward vision and mission attainment. Superintendent communication and modeling of the district's vision and mission were other notable leadership practices identified by stakeholders. In addition, these leaders discussed how the superintendent has empowered them to lead. Finally, perceptions regarding the superintendents' focus on district culture were described. From the way in which buildings are designed and created to how people are greeted when they enter a district facility, each of the nine leaders pointed toward the superintendent's focus on establishing a culture that supports the district's direction.

Conclusions

Both research questions in this study aimed to discover the leadership practices of the superintendent of schools as they pursue their district's vision and mission in an environment of high-stakes testing. The first question examined these leadership practices as identified by the superintendents themselves. The second question uncovered practices of the superintendent from the perspective of leaders within the superintendent's district. While some of the leadership practices discovered were general

practices that can be found throughout the literature, I have worked to associate how these general practices answer the research questions posed." Two conclusions are drawn based on the analysis of the data:

Superintendents Purposefully Develop Their District's Unique Culture

Upon analyzing each school district represented in this study, all three were vastly different. School District A was a small school district fighting to keep their small-town feel as growth from the neighboring urban, and suburban cities inched closer to their district's boundaries. District A was guided by vision work that aimed for becoming "an exceptional school system." Their strategic plan focused on initiatives such as innovative learning models and building leadership capacity in others. They pride themselves in being processes oriented and worked diligently to personalize learning for every child.

School District B was a large suburban school district striving to make a name for themselves within the vast number of cities that touched their borders. Their work concentrated on "cultivating a passion for learning." As they pursued this mission, they were guided by directing all efforts toward establishing a true "joy of learning" in all students and staff that were a part of their organization. Community engagement was at the heart of their strategic plan as they aimed to "cultivate a unified culture of parental and community engagement."

School District C was a rural school district made up of and surrounded by farmland with many low-income families. The superintendent spoke to the overarching concern of the community, noting that multiple students graduate high school and move on to college, only to come back home without a degree and work on the family farm. Their district's mission spoke specifically to "breaking the generational poverty cycle."

To pursue this mission, they created a CBAS that aimed at developing students that were college ready, workforce ready, and lifetime learners.

While each school district was different in their makeup, each possessed the same commonality. Led by the superintendent of schools, all three of these school districts have prioritized developing their unique culture while mitigating the pressures associated with the high-stakes testing environment. Instead of adopting the state's design of accountability using high-stakes testing results to determine student achievement and success, all three districts adopted a model that reflected the unique and specific desires of their community.

Each superintendent in this study worked with district and community stakeholders to develop strategic action plans in order to realize their district's vision and mission. Statements from superintendents in this study underscored the importance of establishing the right culture that fits their community. "Your culture should be built around making sure strategies are implemented and carried out," said Superintendent B. He continued, stating "If your culture is built around certain things that will not allow strategies and vision and mission to be successful, then you've got the wrong culture." Superintendent C pointed to the work associated with his district's strategic plan and stated that the success of any plan could only be attained "if your culture supports those initiatives."

These superintendents have not only looked to influence the internal culture of the school district but also prioritized the work that influences the external cultural environment found in the community. Communication of the vision, mission, and strategic plan was a key leadership practice for each superintendent. The communication

carried out by each superintendent showcased the importance of aligning the school district with the uniqueness of their community. For example, Superintendent B noted, "It's about building that culture of good things but telling that story that's going to spread through the community." He went on to describe the norm they have established between their school district and community as it pertains to culture, "We're in it together. We're not just working in isolation. We're working as a team."

Each superintendent also worked to mitigate the high-stakes testing environment found within their district. Even as work was done to suppress this environment, the pressures and stress associated with high-stakes testing remained. For example, Superintendent C noted of the high-stakes testing environment, "when you still talk with teachers, they put incredible pressure on themselves." Superintendent B echoed the pressures he has seen from the high-stakes testing environment:

> There's so much accountability when it comes to performance for students and really performance for teachers. I think teachers put more pressure on themselves, knowing that we have all the data and that we can look at so many different forms to determine performance for their students. So yeah, there's pressure on them, unfortunately.

While working to mitigate the ever-present high-stakes testing environment, it was discovered that these superintendents did not simply ignore high-stakes testing in their district. Said Superintendent A:

> It's walking that fine line of understanding that it does have a place, and it does impact our community. And, in some grades, our kids are going to be held

accountable. But, on the other hand, making sure that our instruction is not

STAAR driven. Because, if it is, it will not benefit our kids in the long run.

Perceptions of the superintendent's leadership also indicated how these

superintendents have focused on the district's unique culture while working to alleviate

the pressures associated with the high-stakes testing environment. As discussed in

Chapter IV, central office administrators, campus principals, and board members all

alluded to the superintendent prioritizing the development of culture as a means to

mitigate the high-stakes testing environment. Said High School Principal B of his

superintendent, "he will definitely talk about culture and how important culture is. I

believe that there are some districts that their culture is suffering in order to get high

marks and high results." Later in the interview, he discussed how the superintendent has

empowered him to lead and remarked, "The things that people are in charge of, he lets

them be in charge of. That to me is, I think really, at the heart of what we're supposed to

be about and the culture that he's created."

Aligning Practice with Purpose

Trevor and Varcoe (2017) argued that today's organizational leaders understand

the work of their enterprise should be aligned to their organization's purpose. They

found that leaders know what strategies, capabilities, resources, and management systems

are needed and yet tend to prioritize and focus on only one of these areas, thus excluding

the others. Enterprise alignment, they described as "a tightly managed enterprise value

chain that connects an enterprise's purpose (what we do and why we do it) to its business

strategy (what we are trying to win at to fulfill our purpose) . . ." (p. 3). Superintendents

in this study have worked to meet enterprise alignment. They intentionally designed

leadership practices and school action (strategy) around the district's vision and mission (purpose).

An example of this alignment is the superintendent's communication of the district's efforts toward their vision and mission. From staff members to students to board members to community members, these superintendents intentionally and purposefully monitored how they communicated with each group and what each message entailed. What these superintendents communicated was the strategic planning and action that have led toward the attainment of their district's vision and mission. Said Superintendent A, "We talk about community-based accountability. We talk about learner profiles. We talk about strategic planning. We talk about professional learning." Superintendent B echoed Superintendent A's response, "We spend a lot of time with our community. . ." When asked what he communicated to his community, he responded with ". . . the things that are important to us."

What these superintendents did not communicate was STAAR testing or its results in front of staff or community members. Said Superintendent A, ". . . when we do [communicate], none of that is STAAR testing." In the review of the documents collected, not one of the three school districts' vision or mission discussed its purpose as obtaining high-test scores. Additionally, each district's CBAS and strategic plan did not specifically refer to high test scores on state-mandated assessments, thus minimizing conversations around STAAR results. Conversations around STAAR results did not align the district's purpose with its practices and thus have been eliminated.

More examples discovered in this study indicated how these superintendents are aligning their practices with the district's purpose. Professional learning in each district

was intentionally designed to align with the district's purpose. For example, sessions that discuss and analyze STAAR results were no longer found. Replacing these sessions were, as Superintendent A discussed, "the things that we want to be about: voice, choice, taking risks, innovation." She added that, in District A, they want to make sure "that the things that we are thinking about and talking about and are reflective of are our beliefs and where we want to go as a district. . . that's what we want our classrooms to be about." Intentionally removed in District A were the leadership practices and planning geared toward improving scores on high-stakes tests; they did not align with the purpose of the district. "There's no data walls, data war rooms, data notebooks, which I have created in the past," said Superintendent A. "There's none of that."

Evidence from stakeholders interviewed regarding the perceptions they held about their superintendent indicated the intentionality of these superintendents' alignment of practice and purpose. One board member stated that his superintendent discusses vision and mission each time the board convenes. A campus principal explained the communication he saw from his superintendent. The principal discussed how meeting agendas and year-end reviews were intentionally designed by the superintendent to discuss the actions taking place by the campus and district that led toward vision and mission attainment. He went on to say that neither of those examples had "anything to do with state testing." Documents collected verified the focus on vision and mission driven actions.

In all the leadership practices discovered, it was found that these superintendents were intentional. From networking with other leaders about community-based accountability systems to holding internal leaders accountable for the work toward

pursuing the district's vision and mission, each superintendent in this study prioritized their attention and leadership toward ensuring that the actions within their district were intentionally aligned to the district's purpose.

Connections to Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework used in this study was based on Schein's (2004) definition of organizational culture, which states:

> a pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, taught to new members as the current way to perceive, think, and feel in relations to connection with the problems. (p. 17)

The six primary embedding mechanisms that, according to Schein (2010), shape an organization's culture were discussed in Chapter III. Five of the six primary embedding mechanisms were found in this study, including:

What leaders pay attention to, measure, and control. While pursuing their district's vision and mission in the environment of high-stakes testing, these superintendents have prioritized their efforts on work that leads toward that vision and mission. Evidence was found via the creation of strategic plans in each of the three districts studied. These strategic plans offered action items that faithfully pursued the established direction of the district. Objectives such as "Create an innovative learning environment that empowers students to become creative and collaborative problem solvers" were found, which included action steps such as to "Develop and implement a comprehensive plan to provide students with opportunities to follow their own passions and interests through explorative inquiry-based learning with real-world applications."

Progress on these strategic plans was communicated to the community via documents such as "District Scorecards" and "State of Schools" reports. In these reports, the superintendents acknowledged the drive toward a community-based accountability system in which the district pursues the hopes and dreams of the community members. For example, in one of the reports, the superintendent noted:

I want you to know that we are accountable to you. We will meet the accountability standards set forth by our legislation, but we will not give them more merit than they are worth. We cannot judge a child based on one test taken in the Spring. Their talents and their growth are worth so much more.

In addition, updates on strategic plan action have shaped the agendas of each of the district's monthly board meetings. The superintendents in this study have paid attention to the work that impacts the district's vision and mission, and they have measured that work and sought to mitigate and control the impact of the high-stakes testing environment.

How leaders react to critical incidents and organizational crises. When a crisis surrounding the pursuit of the district's vision and mission arose, evidence was found that these superintendents continued their drive toward vision attainment. An example was cited by a high school principal participant who, in conversations with his superintendent, described his campus's "unfavorable performance" on a recent STAAR exam. Instead of focusing on the result of the STAAR exam, the superintendent did not waiver from leadership regarding the vision and mission. The superintendent continued to focus on aligning the work of the district with its purpose and create a positive learning environment instead of turning all focus on improving STAAR scores. While these

superintendents have not ignored the high-stakes testing environment, this example showed how a superintendent did not succumb to the pressures associated with the high-stakes testing environment and continued to press forward toward vision and mission attainment.

How leaders allocate resources. Superintendents in this study have continuously allocated resources toward vision and mission obtainment. Examples were provided, including the design and creation of district facilities to help support the district in its work toward its vision and mission. Professional learning time was focused on the district's vision and mission rather than on STAAR results. Conversely, time allocated toward discussing STAAR results with staff was removed completely. Fiscal resources were allocated to create scorecards and mailouts describing the district's pursuit of its strategic plan. Coupled with Schein's (2010) first primary embedding mechanism, these superintendents have paid attention to resource allocation and worked to ensure that resources were prioritized toward vision and mission attainment.

Deliberate role modeling, teaching, and coaching. Superintendents in this study were perceived by other district leaders as modeling their district's vision and mission. For example, one stakeholder described her superintendent as "living that mission with our staff and students." It was also discovered that the coaching and modeling showcased by these superintendents have inspired others to "be a better role model" as well. As previously mentioned, these superintendents allocated professional learning time toward vision and mission attainment. The intent of allocating this time was to teach and coach their staff toward ensuring that the actions in their district were aligned to its purpose. These superintendents have intentionally focused their staff's

development on work associated with the district's vision and mission and not that of high-stakes testing.

      How leaders allocate rewards and status. In the collection of data, evidence was found indicating how these superintendents have allocated rewards and status toward that of the district's mission and vision. For example, banners awarded to the school district indicating success on accountability ratings associated with high-stakes testing were removed from the campus and district. Replacing the banners and awards that promoted the high-stakes testing environment were "District Scorecards" and "State of Schools" reports. These documents intentionally communicated to stakeholders how the district is progressing toward the established goals that align with their specific vision and mission. This intentional focus on celebrating actions, rewards, and accomplishments that align with the district's purpose has helped drive the culture that the superintendent wanted to create and sustain in the district.

Connections to the Texas Superintendent Certificate Standards

      As outlined in the Texas Education Code (§242.15), eight standards have been adopted by the State Board of Education to ensure that superintendents in the State of Texas have the knowledge and skills to be successful in their job. Adherence to these eight standards is expected of any professional who holds a superintendent certificate. In addition, certified superintendents must continuously pursue these standards through on-going professional development (Texas Education Code, §242.1 (c)). The leadership practices of superintendents discovered in this study have been found to be aligned with many of these standards.

For example, Learner-Centered Leadership and School District Culture (Texas Education Code, §242.15 (c)) is the second standard required of superintendents. In this standard, superintendents shall ". . .shape school district culture by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision. . ." (Texas Education Code, §242.15 (c)). Ten practices are required of superintendents in this standard, including understanding, valuing, and being able to:

- establish and support a school district culture that promotes learning, high expectations, and academic rigor for self, student, and staff performance;

- facilitate the development and implementation of a shared vision that focuses on teaching and learning;

- institute and monitor planning processes that include strategies designed to ensure the accomplishment of school district goals and objectives to achieve the school district's vision;

- facilitate the use and allocation of all available resources to support the implementation of the school district's vision and goals; and

- recognize and celebrate contributions of staff and community toward realization of the school district's vision. (Texas Education Code, §242.15 (c)).

As mentioned previously, the superintendents interviewed for this study have focused on district culture and aligning practice with purpose. Many of the examples cited throughout this study not only align with Schein's primary embedding mechanisms of organizational culture, but also correspond almost exactly with the components of the Texas Superintendent Standard related to school district culture.

Other standards within the Code require superintendents to ". . . develop, implement, and evaluate a comprehensive professional development plan. . ." (Texas Education Code, §242.15 (d) (1)); "articulate the school district's vision and priorities to the community and to the media" (Texas Education Code, §242.15 (f) (8)); and "acquire, allocate, and manage resources according to school district vision and priorities" (Texas Education Code, §242.15 (g) (8)).

These standards, as well as others, are aligned with the practices discovered in this study. It is worthy to note that not one standard or sub-standard required in the Code asks superintendents to improve high-stakes test scores. In fact, it could be argued that superintendents pursuing the attainment of their school district's vision and mission are much more aligned with the state superintendent standards than those that are solely focused on improving test scores.

Connections to Leadership Models

The leadership practices discovered in this research can correlate to many leadership models found throughout the literature. Two specific examples of models connected to this research are The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership by Kouzes and Posner (2017) and Total Quality Management by Deming (1991).

Kouzes and Posner's (2017) Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership specifies leadership practices that allow leaders to "make extraordinary things happen in their organization" (Kouzes & Posner, 2017, p. xxi). These five practices are:

- Challenging the process;
- Inspiring a shared vision;
- Enabling others to act;

- Modeling the way; and

- Encouraging the heart (Kouzes & Posner, 2017).

Each one of the practices discovered in this study has a connection to one of the five leadership behaviors described by Kouzes and Posner's (2017) model. Evidence in this study has shown how superintendents are challenging the high-stakes testing environment, inspiring the school district's vision, empowering others to lead, modeling the work they are inspiring, and working to build trust and reach stakeholders.

Another leadership model that has connections to this research is Deming's (1991) Fourteen Points of Total Quality Management. With his fourteen points, Deming argued that leaders of organizations create systems in which: (a) employees are satisfied, (b) there is a systemic focus on continuous improvement, and (c) organizational change and transformation is shared by everyone in the organization. Deming (1991) discussed the importance of driving out fear in the organization as one of his primary points. Without question, superintendents in this study have worked continuously to drive out the fear associated with the high-stakes testing environment in the districts they serve. Said one superintendent:

> Whenever we report performance, we are much more focused on drawing the complete and full picture. That means what we're doing from character development, social and emotional health, and academic performance. We look at it from things like, our 65 graduates got 2.3 million dollars in scholarships and awards last year, how many national scholars did we have, what kinds of colleges and universities are they getting into, what percentage of our students are going into military, and if they're going into the career, do they have a livable wage?

Looking at it from that perspective, a much more comprehensive and broad

perspective as opposed to just one test.

Recommendations

Data collected from this research identified the perceived leadership practices of

three superintendents functioning in a high-stakes testing environment. The results of

this study point to several recommendations for superintendents and policy makers, as

well as for future research.

Recommendations for Superintendents

As superintendents pause and reflect upon their actions and leadership practices,

this study could help them identify if and how their leadership is aligned to their

organization's purpose. Many superintendents across the state struggle with balancing

the demands placed upon school districts by the state, while realizing the wants and

desires of their communities. Tension has been created stemming from a mismatch

between the state's measurement system and the purpose of schools and schooling;

leading toward goal displacement. In fact, this tension has increased as recent studies

have shown that the reliability of STAAR is under question and becoming more

scrutinized (Lopez & Pilgrim, 2016; Szabo & Barton, 2019).

Superintendents in this study have aimed at reducing the tension created by the

mismatch of goals and purpose by aligning their leadership actions with their school

district's vision and mission. Whether the district's purpose is "a joy of learning,"

"breaking the generational poverty cycle," or becoming "an exceptional school system,"

each one of the superintendents studied has led their district toward developing goals that

lead to action aligned with their district's vision and mission. As other school leaders

reflect on how their actions and practices are aligned to their district's purpose, specific

questions could be asked, such as: How are my leadership practices aligned toward

vision and mission attainment? What type of culture am I promoting—one that centers

around high-stakes testing or one that pursues the district's vision and mission? Are my

leadership practices encouraging more pressure associated with high-stakes testing or

redirecting that pressure?

Recommendations for Policy Makers

A recommendation for policy makers as a result of this study could be for districts

to consider how their board policies are aligned to their school district's purpose. An

example is the evaluation of the superintendent of schools. Local school boards have two

options when annually evaluating the superintendent (Texas Education Code, §21.354).

One option is the Commissioner of Education's recommended appraisal worksheet while

the second option is a locally created evaluation system approved by a district's board of

trustees. Of the two evaluation systems, the Commissioner's recommended appraisal

tightly aligns evaluation criteria to the results of STAAR scores (TASB, 2019, para. 6),

while a locally created evaluation system grants autonomy as long as the evaluation

system is "developed in consultation with site-based advisory teams" (TASB, 2019, para.

3). It could be argued that the Commissioner of Education's evaluation tool only

heightens the high-stakes testing environment. As superintendents recommend policies

to board members and trustees vote to enact these policies, a study could provide

information about how these policies support the alignment of practice with purpose.

As educators continue to argue against high-stakes testing, another

recommendation for policy makers, as a result of this study, is the consideration of other

ways to measure a student's academic progress and achievement besides high-stakes tests. While the results of this study were quite clear that STAAR scores were not the primary focus of these leaders' work, questions remain as to how these leaders do systematically assess academic learning. Parents and community members expect their children to receive a quality education through the public-school system, including literacy, numeracy, communication, problem solving, and other key skills necessary for successfully functioning in our economy and democratic society. Legislators work to meet those demands by enacting and monitoring policies that, they believe, provide an efficient and effective metric of student achievement. School boards argue for local control and approve policies such as community-based accountability systems that strive to meet the unique needs of their communities. However, if STAAR testing is not the most appropriate metric to measure a student's knowledge of academic content, educators and policy makers will need to identify the metrics that are appropriate, and local and state policies will need to align with those decisions.

Recommendations for Future Research

All three of the superintendents in this study acknowledged a transition in their leadership from focusing on high-stakes testing to concentrating on the district's vision and mission. As one superintendent said, "When I first became a superintendent, high-stakes testing and test results were everything to me." Another superintendent said that during her first two years in the superintendency "we celebrated" when referring to the results of high-stakes test scores. However, at some point in their careers, each superintendent transitioned his or her focus toward the district's vision and mission and away from high-stakes testing. A study into this transition of the superintendent's focus

could provide meaning to the superintendency in general and serve as an extension to this research.

Another recommendation for future research is to assess the role educators may play in the reinforcement and promotion of the high-stakes testing environment. As described in the review of the literature, multiple scholars have identified the negative impact high-stakes testing has had on public education. However, throughout Texas public schools, an array of STAAR related instruction and activities can be found as educators aim at maximizing student scores and closing gaps. Examples such as test prep worksheets, STAAR benchmark exams, weekend STAAR prep academies, STAAR pep-rallies, and many more showcase a significant response by educators to high-stakes testing. Additionally, the vocabulary educators regularly use in association with high-stakes testing, such as data, outcomes, measurement, accountability, and student achievement may serve to reinforce the emphasis placed on the tests themselves rather than the quality teaching and important learning that is ultimately desired. Gunzenhauser (2003) warned that public schools have taken on a default philosophy of education; "one that places inordinate value on the scores achieved on high-stakes tests, rather than on the achievement that the scores are meant to represent" (p. 51). A study that examines the impact educators have in the promotion of the high-stakes testing environment could add significant depth to this study.

Another recommendation for future research is to examine how districts with different demographics respond to the high stakes testing environment. In a study conducted by Hanover Research (2014), students from higher socio-economic backgrounds were found to have scored better on achievement tests and have a greater

chance of graduating from high school and attending college than students from less affluent backgrounds. More recently, Rutherford (2018) found that student achievement on standardized tests is strongly associated with sociodemographic factors. It would be interesting to study whether districts with high numbers of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch place more emphasis on test preparation and less emphasis on other, non-tested curriculum areas, than their counterparts who serve more affluent students.

A final recommendation for future research relates to the leadership practices of superintendents as they pertain to their district's accountability rating. As school districts receive their rating each year, do the leadership choices and practices of superintendents vary from those districts that received a score of "A" or "B" as opposed to those districts that received a lower rating? Regardless of test scores or rankings, scholars such as Newmann and Wehlage (1993) explained that educators and learning institutions should prioritize efforts toward providing quality instruction and aligned assessment in order to improve student performance. Even so, the pressures associated with obtaining high accountability rankings are great and may correlate with leadership decisions that are intended to drive the improvement of test scores. A study investigating how superintendent leadership practices differ depending upon a district's accountability rating is recommended.

Final Thoughts

As I write this dissertation and serve as a superintendent of schools in the State of Texas, I have embarked on articulating the vision, mission, beliefs, and core values for our school district. In that work, I have had multiple listening sessions with stakeholders (students, staff, parents, and community members) and received hundreds of responses

regarding their hopes and dreams for the students in our district and our organization. Not one response from any group mentioned anything about a desire for improving test scores. In similar work in a previous school district, the same result occurred; no one indicated they wanted students to improve on high-stakes, standardized tests. These experiences have led me to believe that stakeholders in public education seem to desire more for our students than high test scores. In conversations with all participants in this study, the evidence has indicated this same belief.

Even though our state assesses student achievement from the results of STAAR scores, we must find a better balance and a more suitable and authentic proxy for student learning. Some local communities desire certain outcomes from our educational system, while the state wants others, creating an ongoing tension. Caught in the middle of this learning accountability push-and-pull are our students. Superintendent B repeatedly mentioned a culture that centers around "a joy of learning." Are we, as superintendents and other leaders, promoting a culture that emphasizes that joy of learning? Or, are we leading in a way that results in a child not wanting to go to the third grade simply because he or she will be required to take the STAAR test?

Finally, whether to pursue high STAAR scores or the district's vision and mission is not a binary decision for school leaders. A superintendent can lead a school district toward its vision and mission and still have high test scores. STAAR testing has a place in public schools when used as one of multiple measurements of student learning. However, when used as the overall, single means to assess our students, schools, and districts, an unacceptable environment of high-stakes testing, and goal displacement is created.

This study has shown how selected superintendents pursue their school district's vision and mission in a high-stakes testing environment. Specific leadership practices have been discovered, and examples have been provided. It is my hope the work of this research will inspire many school administrators to reflect on their leadership practices and ask the question: How am I leading in this environment of high-stakes testing?

APPENDIX SECTION

Appendix A

Schein's Embedding Mechanisms for Organizational Culture

<u>Primary Embedding Mechanisms</u>

- What leaders pay attention to, measure, and control on a regular basis

- How leaders react to critical incidents and organizational crises

- How leaders allocate resources

- Deliberate role modeling, teaching, and coaching

- How leaders allocate rewards and status

- How leaders recruit, select, promote, and excommunicate

Retrieved from Schein, 2010, p. 236.

Appendix B

Email to Nominated Participants

Dr. [insert superintendent's last name],

My name is Cade Smith, and I am a doctoral candidate at Texas State University pursuing a Ph.D. in School Improvement. I am conducting a research study entitled *Leadership Practices of Selected Texas Public School Superintendents Pursuing Their District's Vision and Mission in an Environment of High-Stakes Testing*. An expert panel consisting of Dr. Kevin Brown, Dr. John Horn, Dr. Dawson Orr, Dr. Denise Collier, and Dr. Marla McGee have nominated you as a prospective participant to my study, and I would like to extend this formal invitation to you for your participation.

- If you agree to participate, your direct involvement would be the following:
- Collection and submission of district documents such as your district's vision and mission, strategic plan, and district professional development agendas;
- One face-to-face or virtual interview with me lasting approximately 45 minutes - 1 hour; and
- A review of the interview transcript to ensure I have captured your intended responses.

Also, with your participation, three district stakeholders would be required to participate; one district administrative leader, one campus administrative leader, and one school board or community member; all of your choosing. The purpose of their involvement will be to identify their perceptions of your leadership in the environment of high-stakes testing. One interview will take place with each participant lasting approximately 45 minutes each. All findings of this study will remain anonymous as a pseudonym will identify every participant.

You can respond to this email if you elect to participate in this study or call my cell [insert cell number] if you want to discuss. Thank you for the work you do leading our public schools serving our students and communities.

Cade Smith
Doctoral Candidate - Texas State University

Consent Form for Interviews

TEXAS ★ STATE ®

INFORMED CONSENT

Study Title: Leadership Practices of Selected Texas Public School Superintendents Pursuing Their District's Vision and Mission in an Environment of High-Stakes Testing

Principal Investigator: Cade Smith **Co-Investigator/Faculty Advisor: Barry Aidman**
  Email: cs28461@txstate.edu   **Email:** bja@txstate.edu
  Phone: 512-955-1112   **Phone:** 512-245-6033

This consent form will give you the information you will need to understand why this research study is being done and why you are being invited to participate. It will also describe what you will need to do to participate as well as any known risks, inconveniences or discomforts that you may have while participating. We encourage you to ask questions at any time. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and it will be a record of your agreement to participate. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND
You are invited to participate in a research study to learn more about the leadership practices of superintendents, in the State of Texas, who are pursuing their district's mission and vision in the environment of high-stakes testing. The information gathered will be used describe how a select group of superintendents pursue their district's mission and vision with the external pressures of a high-stakes testing environment. You are being asked to participate because you were identified, by an expert panel as a superintendent who would be an excellent participant.

PROCEDURES
If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview that will take approximately 45-60 minutes. During the interview, you will be asked to share your leadership practices as a superintendent leading a school district toward its mission and vision. For example, you will be asked: How do you prioritize high-stakes testing in your district? Are their specific leadership practices that you use to lead the people in your district so that their focus is on the mission and vision of your district and not high stakes testing?

After the interview you may be asked clarifying questions as a follow up via email or phone call. Additionally, you will be asked to review the transcripts from the interview and report back any inaccuracies. I would estimate your involvement in this study to be 1-2 hours. The interview will be audio recorded and the researcher may take notes as well. To protect the privacy of participants, pseudonyms will be used in reporting the findings of this study.

RISKS/DISCOMFORTS
There are no known risks associated with participating in the research. In the event that some of the interview questions make you uncomfortable or upset, you are always free to decline to answer or to stop your participation at any time. All answers will remain anonymous.

BENEFITS/ALTERNATIVES
There will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study. However, the information that you provide may serve to inform other superintendents who are seeking to engage in leadership practices that help them pursue their district's mission and vision in the environment of high-stakes testing.

EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY

Reasonable efforts will be made to keep the personal information in your research record private and confidential. Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. The members of the research team, and the Texas State University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) may access the data. The ORC monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research participants.

Your name will not be used in any written reports or publications which result from this research. Data will be kept for three years (per federal regulations) after the study is completed and then destroyed.

PAYMENT/COMPENSATION

You will not be paid for your participation in this research.

PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw from it at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

QUESTIONS

If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in this study, you may contact the Principal Investigator, Cade Smith: 512-955-1112

DOCUMENTATION OF CONSENT

I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. Its general purposes, the particulars of involvement and possible risks have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand I can withdraw at any time.

_____   _____   _____

Printed Name of Study Participant   **Signature** of Study Participant   Date

_____   _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent   Date

DOCUMENTATION OF CONSENT

I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. Its general purposes, the particulars of involvement and possible risks have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand I can withdraw at any time.

_____   _____   _____

Printed Name of Study Participant   **Signature** of Study Participant   Date

_____   _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent   Date

Appendix D

Interview Guide of Superintendent

Time: TBD   Date: TBD
Place: TBD   Interview topic: Leadership practices

Interview purpose: To discover leadership practices superintendents utilize to pursue their district's vision and mission while navigating the environment of high stakes testing.

Interview type: Semi-structured conversational interview

Introduction: Good evening. I cannot thank you enough for agreeing to participate in this study. How are you? Are you ready to start the interview? Let me read the consent form with you and see if you have any questions.

[Read consent form – See Appendix B]

Do you have any questions regarding the consent from? Please sign the consent form. Here is a copy for your personal files.

Let's get started. I will ask you a series of questions on "leadership practices." Please feel free to ask for repetition or any clarity into the question if you feel necessary.

1. What does your mission and vision mean to you?
2. Would you give me some examples of how you and your team are pursuing this district's mission and vision?
3. In what ways does the environment of high-stakes testing impact your leadership as the superintendent of schools?
4. How do you think about and reflect upon the high-stakes testing environment in relation to your district's vision and mission?
5. How do you prioritize high-stakes testing in your district? What role does it play in curriculum, instruction, and assessment? In scheduling? In funding?
6. As superintendent, are there things you specifically do or avoid doing as a response to the high-stakes testing environment?
7. How does high-stakes testing influence your employees and your district's culture?
8. What leadership practices do you use related to influencing your district's culture regarding high stakes testing?
9. How do you think stakeholders respond to your leadership?
10. How has the high-stakes testing environment impacted your leadership practices?
11. Is there any other information that you would like to share with me today? Is there anything I did not ask in the interview and that you consider important to add to our conversation today?

Thank you for your time and participation. Your answers are very important for my research. I will contact you again for possible follow up questions and/or any clarification. Once I have transcribed this interview, I will provide you a copy for your review and feedback.

Interview Guide of District or Campus Leader

Time: TBD   Date: TBD
Place: TBD   Interview topic: Leadership practices

Interview purpose:
To discover how the leadership practices superintendents utilize to pursue their district's vision and mission while navigating the environment of high stakes testing are perceived by stakeholders.

Interview type: Semi-structured conversational interview

Introduction: Good evening. I cannot thank you enough for agreeing to participate in this study. How are you? Are you ready to start the interview? Let me read the consent form with you and see if you have any questions.

[Read consent form – See Appendix B]

Do you have any questions regarding the consent from? Please sign the consent form. Here is a copy for your personal files.

Let's get started. I will ask you a series of questions on "leadership practices." Please feel free to ask for repetition or any clarity into the question if you feel necessary.

1. What does your mission and vision mean to you?
2. What are your reflections about your superintendent's leadership related to your district's mission and vision and high-stakes testing?
3. Would you give me some examples of how the superintendent is collaborating with you to pursue this district's mission and vision?
4. Can you explain how the environment of high-stakes testing has impacted your role?
5. Where do you think the superintendent prioritizes high stakes testing? In curriculum and instruction? In scheduling? In funding?
6. How do you know? Are there certain characteristics or practices that he/she has done to influence your thinking?
7. How have these practices impacted your role in the district?
8. What type of culture has the superintendent's leadership created in this district? Can you provide some examples of how this culture has been established and sustained?
9. Is there any other information that you would like to share with me today? Is there anything I did not ask in the interview and that you consider important to add to our conversation today?

Thank you for your time and participation. Your answers are very important for my research. I will contact you again for possible follow up questions and/or any clarification. Once I have transcribed this interview, I will provide you a copy for your review and feedback.

Interview Guide of School Board or Community Member

Time: TBD   Date: TBD
Place: TBD   Interview topic: Leadership practices

Interview purpose:
To discover how the leadership practices superintendents utilize to pursue their district's vision and mission while navigating the environment of high stakes testing are perceived by stakeholders.

Interview type: Semi-structured conversational interview

Introduction: Good evening. I cannot thank you enough for agreeing to participate in this study. How are you? Are you ready to start the interview? Let me read the consent form with you and see if you have any questions.

[Read consent form – See Appendix B]

Do you have any questions regarding the consent from? Please sign the consent form. Here is a copy for your personal files.

Let's get started. I will ask you a series of questions on "leadership practices." Please feel free to ask for repetition or any clarity into the question if you feel necessary.

1. What does the district's mission and vision mean to you?
2. What are your reflections about your superintendent's leadership related to your district's mission and vision and high-stakes testing?
3. Would you give me some examples of how the superintendent is collaborating with you to pursue this district's mission and vision?
4. Can you explain how the environment of high-stakes testing has impacted your role?
5. Where do you think the superintendent prioritizes high stakes testing? In curriculum and instruction? In scheduling? In funding?
6. How do you know? Are there certain characteristics or practices that he/she has done to influence your thinking?
7. What type of culture has the superintendent's leadership created in this district? In this community? Can you provide some examples of how this culture has been established and sustained?
8. Is there any other information that you would like to share with me today? Is there anything I did not ask in the interview and that you consider important to add to our conversation today?

Thank you for your time and participation. Your answers are very important for my research. I will contact you again for possible follow up questions and/or any

clarification. Once I have transcribed this interview, I will provide you a copy for your review and feedback.

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