

## Factors Influencing Rural Superintendent 94792 re9sPCID 2BDC 00 0 RGFactor

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### Abstract

The position of superintendent has long been characterized by high rates of turnover. The purpose of this study was to examine the factors that influence the anticipated length of service of the current superintendents in a Midwestern state. It examined superintendent responses to determine trends affecting length of tenure. The findings of this study showed a disconnect in superintendent recognition of the most challenging aspect of the position. While current superintendents overwhelmingly recognize the importance of relationships, they tend to put less effort into strengthening their relationship with the local school board. As such, deterioration of that relationship leads to the most frequently reported rationale for superintendent departure from a district. Additionally, the study determined that the most significant factor that would convince young superintendents to remain with a school district is offering an increase in compensation. Some turnover is expected given the age of many superintendents as they ascend to the position, but with an influx of young district leaders it is crucial that school boards offer assistance monetarily and through training and recognition of the importance of relationship to successful district tenure.

### Key Words

superintendent tenure; rural leadership; relationships with school board members

One hundred years ago the *Journal of Education* professional in American education than the

this day the office of superintendent in the public school system is viewed as both crucial and pivotal to the success of both students and Superintendents know they can change the trajectory of children's lives, alter the behavior of organizations, and expand the

2001, p. 428).

superintendency is a critically important leadership posi

Given the importance of the position, it is not surprising that with it comes intense pressure and difficulty. As such, the office of superintendent in the public school system is characterized by high stress and frequent turnover (Hawk, 2011, p. 364).

According to the *2016 American Association of School Administrators Superintendent Salary & Benefits Study*, half of the superintendents served in their present position from one to five years and a quarter of superintendents served from six to ten years (Domenech, 2017). In the state of South Dakota that figure has topped the national average each of the past two years.

According to figures compiled by Rob Monson, School Administrators of South Dakota Executive Director, 23% of public school districts in South Dakota hired a new superintendent in 2013, while in 2014 that figure topped 25%. These figures reflect school district change in superintendents through retirement as well as those individuals either leaving the state, leaving the profession, or leaving a district and taking a superintendent position with another school district within the state of South Dakota.

The tenure of a superintendent has an important direct connection to students, teachers, policies, and achievement. Alsbury (2008) contended that frequent turnover in the

The effects are especially pronounced in rural districts. Alsbury (2008) stated,

In districts of 500 or fewer, often the superintendent acts as the principal of a single K-12 school, and thus would have a more direct connection to the classroom level, and more potential for a direct influence on student achievement

service of the current superintendents in the state of South Dakota.

### **Statement of the Problem**

While the pinnacle of the educational administrative track, the superintendency has long been a position of shortened tenure (Yee

4. How important do superintendents consider the selected perceived rationale for superintendent departure?
5. To what extent do superintendents agree regarding the feasibility of convincing superintendents to stay in their current position?
6. What differences are there in
  - regarding expected tenure based on the following demographic variables?
  - a. Gender
  - b. Age
  - c. Salary
  - d. Education
  - e. Size of District
  - f. Job Satisfaction
  - g. Superintendent Experience

### **Review of the Related Literature**

The position of superintendent has been essential and challenging for generations. Reports from the *Journal of Education* in June 1914 recognized the importance of the district leader, and well outlined the difficulties and public vilification each individual received without regard to the decisions that were made.

Yaffe (2015) recounted way in which modern technology improved the ability to communicate valuable information yet has also increased the ease and frequency with which the abilities of the superintendent can be publicly questioned. The pressure has

make sure those filling positions as superintendents are prepared to maximize such

The local school board must also recognize the challenges faced by the superintendent and be willing to work closely with the individual to ensure success for the entire district.

### **Changing demands**

The office of the superintendent in a public school district is a position requiring intensive education and training. Boyland (2013) noted in her research th

developing capacity for quality teaching and learning, initiating and implementing policies, building relationships between constituency

(p

superintendent is also expected to be a

(Boyland, 2013, p. 87).

### **Impact on districts**

At the time when a superintendent vacates a position, whether it be voluntary or involuntary, it has an impact on the entire district. The difficulty carries beyond the superintendent and permeates the community:

circumstances, bring uncertainty to

(Cook, 2006, p. 14).

The problems exacerbate when moving into the larger context of the community. Short tenures create a public perception of increased instability, lowered morale, a loss of orga

that the district will undergo yet another round of short-lived programs and policies. (Yee & Cuban, 1996, p. 616)

Change takes time to implement as

Houston, past executive director for the American Association of School

impatient, nobody is going to be there to see things change. By the time you are ready to bear fruit, t

4). The impact is felt strongly by the staff of the district.

The impact is felt all the way through to the students in the classrooms of our schools. Forner, Bierlein-Palmer, and Reeves (2012) noted that successful superintendents are hands-on regarding the instruction and monitoring of student academic performance.

The engaged superintendent70044004W\*nBT/F2 12 Tf

These superintendents were identified as the population because the primary researcher was a superintendent of a district in South Dakota with fewer than 1,000 students. Survey responses were received from 103 (81.1%) of current superintendents from qualifying districts. The researcher examined the responses for demographic groupings as well as for overall perceptions regarding the research questions. The data were examined utilizing means and standard deviations to determine the importance that superintendent respondents ascribe to the selected qualities of successful superintendents.

The researcher utilized means and standard deviations to determine the importance of both rewarding and challenging aspects of the superintendency from the perspective of superintendents.

The researcher examined the respondent data and conducted a series of one-way analyses of variance to determine differences in superintendent perceptions regarding numerous demographic variables.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

Several factors may affect the interpretation and generalizability of the results of this study.

1. The study was limited to the superintendents of K-12 public school districts within the state of South

Dakota. Results should not be generalized to states with a vastly different makeup of rural, suburban, and urban districts.

2. The primary researcher was a member of the group of 151 public school superintendents being studied. This relationship could impact data in ways that cannot be determined.
3. The respondents were answering a survey generated by the researcher. This is a delimitation of the study, as a different survey tool may find different results.

### **Findings**

The findings of each analysis are detailed within this next section. Each survey question was established on a Likert scale with a score of 1 identified as *Not at all important* and a score of 5 identified as *Very important*. Statistically significance was identified at the  $p < 0.05$  level.

### **Qualities of successful superintendents**

Research question one determined the extent to which current superintendents rated the importance of personal qualities held by successful superintendents. The data depicted in Table 1 indicate that superintendents find most of the character qualities to be either important or essential to the success of a district superintendent.

Table 1

*Important Qualities of Successful Superintendents*

Factors	Mean	Standard Deviation
Leadership	4.670	0.493
Approachable	4.631	0.560
Professional	4.621	0.544
Relational	4.602	0.583
Verbal Communicator	4.583	0.586
Student-Centered	4.505	0.684

Table 2

*Rewarding Aspects of the Superintendency*

Aspects	Mean	Standard Deviation
Helping students succeed	4.806	0.3975
Helping staff achieve their goals	4.330	0.7056
Making decisions	3.971	0.8455
Diversity of daily tasks	3.874	0.7881
Community visibility	3.796	0.8785
Compensation (salary & benefits)	3.563	0.9668
Meeting state standards	3.272	1.0590
Prestige	2.757	1.0798

**Challenging aspects of the superintendency**

Research question three determined the extent to which current superintendents rated the most challenging aspects of the position of district superintendent. Each survey question was established on a Likert scale with a score of one

identified as *Not at all challenging* and a score of five identified as *Very challenging*. Superintendent respondents closely ranked four definitive challenges, while a fifth qualified in the category as well as shown on Table 3.



Table 3

*Challenging Aspects of the Superintendency*

Challenge faced	Mean	Standard Deviation
Lack of family time	3.874	0.9669
Meeting budgetary constraints	3.864	1.0669
Navigating politics	3.816	0.9367
Lack of personal time	3.806	1.0484
Making difficult decisions	3.631	1.1114
Making personnel decisions	3.544	1.0551
Being on display	3.437	0.9869
Board relations	3.117	1.0874



Based on the statistical analysis the following

12. No statistically significant difference was noted among the demographic variables of gender, salary level, or district size for either rationale for departure or convincing rationale to stay.

## **Discussion**

The superintendent position, especially in rural districts, affords the individual a myriad of both challenges and opportunities. As stated by Garn (2003), superintendents in rural districts are more likely to serve in a dual capacity (filling additional administrative roles or teaching), and they are also more likely to relocate to a rural district with similar student populations.

However, relationships with students





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~~P~~**APPENDIX A**~~A~~

Superintendent Survey

## Superintendent Survey

### Demographic Information

Gender?	- Male
	- Female
Age?	- 30-44
	- 45-59
	- 60+



What of the following would entice you to stay in your current position (Compensation Increase)? What of the following would entice you to stay in your	- Rank on a scale from 1 5 (1 = Not at all an factor)
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