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### SATISFIED SUPERINTENDENTS: A CASE STUDY

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# Satisfied Superintendents:

A Case Study

By

Zachary G. Kassebaum

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Ed.D.

Major: Educational Studies: Educational Leadership in Higher Education

Under the supervision of Professor Marilyn L. Grady

Lincoln, Nebraska

# SATISFIED SUPERINTENDENTS: A CASE STUDY

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University of Nebraska, 2011

Advisor: Marilyn L. Grady

The role of the superintendent is viewed as high-stress. Research reports a high turnover rate in the superintendency. Superintendents face pressure and criticism from several fronts. Despite these circumstances, many superintendents find satisfaction within the position. Through the stories of superintendents, we discover new findings about satisfaction derived from the superintendency.

The purpose of this study was to examine the common characteristics of satisfied superintendents and the components of the superintendency that provide satisfaction. The major contribution of this study is a greater understanding of how superintendents can increase the likelihood of experiencing satisfaction and longevity in their position.

Through interviews, twenty-one superintendents shared their experiences. All interviews were audio-recorded. Data generated were analyzed and coded. Overlap and redundancy of codes were reduced and collapsed into themes.

Four themes emerged from the study: motivation to obtain the superintendency, rewards of the superintendency, supports in the superintendency, and routines to maintain health as a superintendent.

Based on the findings of the study superintendents who reported satisfaction in their roles: provided a structure for their evaluation to be able to gauge the level of their impact, created support systems to assist them in their work, established routines to

promote a healthy lifestyle, and were intentional and meaningful in creating positive interactions with others.

## **Dedication**

I give all thanks and glory to the Lord for the opportunities that have been presented to me in my life to live, to love, and to learn. I dedicate my dissertation to my wife, Kami, and my daughters, MaKaylee Rae, Mattea Jean, and Kallyn Marie Kassebaum. Without their continual love and encouragement this journey would not have been possible.

### ***Philippians 4:13***

*I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.*

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I would like to thank the individuals of Parkview Christian School for the support and flexibility they gave me in pursuing my education.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The position of the superintendent has been described as in a state of crisis (Cooper, Fusarelli, & Carella, 2000) and as a position that can negatively consume an individual's life (Ginsberg, 2007). Research indicates a shortage of candidates exists to fill present and future superintendent openings. Eighty-eight percent of superintendents polled agreed that the "shortage of applicants for the superintendent's job is a serious crisis in American education" (Cooper et al., 2000, p. 4). The literature confirms that superintendent openings are increasing at a higher rate than ever. It is reported that in Texas, 50% of superintendents are expected to retire annually and hundreds change jobs annually (Fusarelli, Cooper, & Carella, 2003). Sutton, Jobe, and McCord (2008) report, "Due to retirements and turnover, nearly 80% of all superintendents could retire or change positions in the next five years" (p. 1).

What motivates someone to pursue the position of the superintendent? Only motivated individuals seek a position with this description. Superintendents are individuals who seek challenges and fulfillment through obtainment. Maslow (1999) described such individuals as being in a "self-actualizing" state—a state in which an individual seeks to become everything he or she is capable of becoming. Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman (1959) indicated job satisfaction comes from success within the job more so than outside factors such as compensation. This may explain why 91% of superintendents in a study agreed with the statement, "My work in the district has given me real career satisfaction" (Cooper et al., 2000, p. 5). Alderfer (1972) expanded upon Maslow's findings and reported that high functioning individuals strive to be in a state of

growth, which happens when an individual is challenged to use full capacities to accomplish a task.

It is through the challenges of the position that high functioning individuals find satisfaction in the superintendency. Herzberg et al. (1959) reported that it is from performance of job tasks that individuals find satisfaction. Edwards, Bell, Arthur and Decuir (2008) related job satisfaction with contextual performance further emphasizing the importance of role clarity and absence of conflict as cited by Spector (1997). Halbesleben and Wheeler (2008) concluded that job satisfaction comes from the relationship between task and contextual performance.

The role of the 21<sup>st</sup> century superintendent provides opportunities for high functioning individuals to feel successful and find satisfaction. Superintendents are asked to do more and more within their respective institutions. They are asked to create a collective and supported vision for the organization (Bennis & Nanus, 2007; Kouzes & Posner, 2007). It has been customary for superintendents to deal with local politics, upset parents, and many special interests. Additionally, legal issues and litigation and a wide spectrum of funding crises consume superintendents' time (Farkas, Johnson, Duffet, Foleno, & Foley, 2001). Superintendents are challenged with leading instruction, showing signs of student achievement, staying at the forefront of technology, being knowledgeable in regard to expectations from the federal level and being a positive political icon in the community (Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, & Ellerson, 2010).

Amid the many challenges facing the superintendency, superintendents find satisfaction in the position. Glass, Bjork, and Brunner (2000) reported the following about superintendents: "Fifty-six percent feel a 'considerable' fulfillment in their current

position” (p. 12). Additionally, 66% of superintendents in the study indicated they would recommend the position to others. Glass et al. (2000) concluded that the position of the superintendency is not in crisis. Sharp, Malone, and Walter (2001) surveyed superintendents in Indiana, Illinois and Texas and found that nearly 90% of superintendents reported finding satisfaction in their position. Sutton et al. (2008) found making a difference, leading learning, compensation, addressing challenging issues, and building a team were all components of the superintendency that provide satisfaction.

### **Purpose Statement**

In order to retain highly qualified and capable superintendents given the current state of the superintendency, it was important to identify the rewards and areas of personal fulfillment that they report. The purpose of this study was to examine the common characteristics of satisfied superintendents and the components of the superintendency that provide satisfaction. The central question for this study was: What rewards do satisfied superintendents find in doing their work? Specific research questions include:

1. What aspects of the superintendency are satisfying?
2. How do superintendents describe “good days” in the superintendency?
3. What supports exist for individuals in the superintendency?
4. What routines do satisfied superintendents implement to maintain their health?

## Chapter 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Success is closely associated with motivation. Motivation is closely associated with satisfaction or the desire to be satisfied. Motivation and satisfaction have been defined both intrinsically and extrinsically. Cameron and Pierce (1994) defined intrinsic motivation as behaviors that appear to have no identifiable or tangible reward. Extrinsic motivation occurs when a reward (a sense of satisfaction) is present for certain behaviors. Kreitner (1995) described motivation as behavior that has been given purpose and direction due to psychological processes. Ryan and Edward (2000) described being motivated as “to be moved to do something. A person who feels no impetus or inspiration to act is thus characterized as unmotivated whereas someone who is energized or activated toward an end is considered motivated” (p. 54). Many models of motivation and satisfaction exist. Job motivation and job satisfaction have been found to be correlates of one another.

#### **Abraham Maslow: Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs**

Abraham Maslow is frequently cited on the topics of human motivation and satisfaction. Maslow viewed motivation as a byproduct of the desire to satisfy personal needs. Maslow (1999) stated the following:

So far as motivational status is concerned, healthy people have sufficiently gratified their basic needs for safety, belongingness, love, respect, and self-esteem so that they are motivated primarily by trends to self-actualization (defined as ongoing actualization of potentials, capacities and talents, as fulfillment of

mission [or call, fate, destiny, or vocation], as a fuller knowledge of, and acceptance of, the person's own intrinsic nature, as an unceasing trend toward unity, integration or synergy within the person (p. 31).

Maslow provided an understanding of motivation through the identification of a hierarchy of needs. Maslow (1970) indicated a person's basic needs must be met before the individual becomes concerned about other needs. As needs are satisfied, new and higher needs become present. "This is what we mean by saying that the basic human needs are organized into a hierarchy of relative prepotency" (p. 17). The foundation of these needs is what Maslow referred to as physiological needs, such as food, oxygen, and water.

Maslow (1970) suggested if physiological needs are met then a new set of needs emerge. This next level is referred to as "safety needs" which involve "Security; stability; dependency; protection, freedom from fear, anxiety, and chaos; need for structure, order, law, and limits; strength in the protector; and so on" (p. 18). Once the physiological needs and safety needs are met, Maslow (1970) suggested that the need for belongingness and love will become apparent. The next area of needs on the hierarchy is "esteem needs." People strive to feel valued and respected by others. "Satisfaction of the self-esteem need leads to feelings of self-confidence, worth, strength, capability, and adequacy of being useful and necessary in the world" (Maslow, 1970, p.21). Maslow (1970) noted "The most stable and therefore most healthy self-esteem is based on deserved respect by others rather than on external fame or celebrity and unwarranted adulation" (p. 22).

Individuals will still have desires or feel discontent even when these needs have been met. Maslow (1970) referred to this as the “self-actualization” need and used this term to mean the desire to “become everything that one is capable of becoming” (p. 22). In this stage the individual strives to become “what one idiosyncratically is” (Maslow, 1970, p. 22). The self-actualizing stage is individual to each person. It is not until an individual reaches the higher levels of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs that he or she can experience satisfaction in tasks beyond satisfying basic needs.

Once in the self actualization stage a person is healthier. Healthier people have the ability to dip into the unconscious and preconscious, to use and value their primary processes instead of fearing them, to accept their impulses instead of always controlling them, and to be able to regress voluntarily without fear (Maslow, 1999, p. 229).

Maslow (1999) emphasized, “Self-actualization does not mean a transcendence of all human problems. Conflict, anxiety, frustration, sadness, hurt, and guilt can all be found in healthy human beings” (p. 230).

### **Frederick Herzberg: Hygiene and Motivation Factors**

Frederick Herzberg et al. (1959) presented *The Motivation to Work* based on an examination of the factors in a person’s work environment that either led to job satisfaction and motivation or dissatisfaction and diminished motivation. Herzberg et al. stated:

This is a book about people at work. More precisely, it is about their attitudes toward their jobs. Work is one of the most absorbing things men can think and



talk about. It fills the greater part of the waking day for most of us. For the fortunate it is the source of great satisfactions; for many others it is the cause of grief (Herzberg et al., 1959, p. 3).

Herzberg et al.'s premise was if a person is satisfied in a job, the individual will be more motivated to perform and, therefore, more productive. "When our respondents reported feeling happy with their jobs, they most frequently described factors related to their tasks, to events that indicated to them that they were successful..." (Herzberg et al., 1959, p. 113). Herzberg et al. reported the factors causing job satisfaction are different than those causing dissatisfaction. He referred to the items causing satisfaction as "satisfiers" and the items causing dissatisfaction as "factors of hygiene." Herzberg et al.'s (1959) findings illustrated that the wants of employees can be divided into two groups. He stated:

One group revolves around the need to develop in one's occupation as a source of personal growth. The second group operates as an essential base to the first and is associated with fair treatment in compensation, supervision, working conditions, and administrative practices (Herzberg et al., 1959, p. 115).

Herzberg et al. (1959) noted the fulfillment of the needs of the second group simply prevents dissatisfaction, lack of motivation and poor job performance. It does not motivate employees to high levels of job performance.

Herzberg et al. (1959) defined factors affecting job-attitude as first level or second level. First-level factors were defined as "an objective element of the situation in which the respondent finds a source for his good or bad feelings about the job" (Herzberg et al., 1959, p. 44). The following categories were identified by Herzberg et al. (1959):

**1. Recognition.**

This criterion was some form of recognition whether an act of praise, criticism or blame. The source did not appear to be significant or relevant.

**2. Achievement.**

This criterion included some form of successful completion of tasks, jobs, and/or solutions to problems.

**3. Possibility of growth.**

The possibility of growth included both an increase or decrease in the perceived likelihood of growth taking place. “An example of this is a change in status that officially included a likelihood that the respondent would be able to rise in a company, or the converse” (p. 45).

**4. Advancement.**

This criterion was used as a person in a certain position actually changed positions or status.

**5. Salary.**

Herzberg et al. described this criteria as “all sequences in which compensation played a role” (p. 46).

**6. Interpersonal relations.**

This criterion was defined within the parameters of interpersonal interaction between the person being interviewed and another person. Herzberg et al. (1959) further identified three major categories of interpersonal interactions:

Interpersonal relations – superior

Interpersonal relations – subordinate

Interpersonal relations – peers

**7. Supervision –technical.**

This criterion was defined by the perceived relationship between the individual and his or her supervisor. The interactions between the supervisor and the individual were critical to this criterion.

**8. Responsibility.**

This category addressed responsibility and authority and how responsibility, or the lack thereof, affected job-attitude.

**9. Company policy and administration.**

This criterion was defined by the clarity of policy as communicated by the organization. Additionally, the overall impact of company policy, whether positive or negative, were key factors in this criterion.

**10. Working conditions.**

Physical working conditions, the workload, and available facilities were included here.

**11. Work itself.**

This criterion referred to the feelings, whether good or bad, that were derived from doing the job or tasks associated with it.

**12. Factors in personal life.**

This criterion included factors related to an individual's personal life that were associated with his or her job. An example was "the company demanded that a man move to a new location in a community in which the man's family was unhappy" (p. 48).

### **13. Status.**

This criterion was used when respondents directly mentioned "status" in relation to their feelings about the job.

### **14. Job security.**

This criterion did not refer to feelings of security as that would indicate a second-level factor. This category included objective signs of the presence or the absence of job security.

In establishing an understanding of Herzberg's work, it is important to know the first and second level factors in his research. First level factors were defined as intrinsic motivators, such as achievement, recognition, and responsibility. Second level factors were not descriptively identified in his findings. Instead, second-level factors came from respondents' self-examination in response to the question, "What did these events mean to you?" (Herzberg et al., 1959, p. 49).

Herzberg et al. (1959) used five primary categories to analyze the effects of job attitudes. The first category, "performance effects," was broken down into three parts: a) Workers reported themselves working better or poorer than usual. b) Workers identified a change in the rate of work. c) Workers reported a change in the quality of work.

The second category was turnover which was analyzed on a continuum of individuals who quit a job and also individuals who turned down lucrative offers to go elsewhere.

The third category was “mental health effects.” Positive and negative effects were obtained but primarily the findings were negative. The negative findings were psychosomatic, physiological, and the wide-ranging symptoms of tension.

The fourth category was either the positive or negative “effects on interpersonal relationships.” The final category was “attitudinal effects” (Herzberg, 1959).

The following table, adapted from Herzberg’s *Motivation to Work*, summarizes the findings of each first-level factor that appeared in high—attitude sequences; that is, sequences in which the employee reports positive feelings and a positive job-attitude.

**Table 1:**

*Percentage of Each First Level Factor Appearing in High Attitude Sequences N = 28*

---

Factor	Total *
Achievement	41
Recognition	33
Work itself	26
Responsibility	23
Advancement	20
Salary	15
Possibility of growth	6
Interpersonal relations –subordinate	6
Status	4
Interpersonal relations-superior	4
Interpersonal relations – peers	3
Supervision – technical	3
Company policy and administration	3
Working conditions	1
Personal life	1
Job security	1

---

\* The percentages total more than 100%, since more than one factor can appear in any single sequence of events (Herzberg et al., 1959).

Herzberg et al.'s findings show the significance of the top five first-level factors in relation to job satisfaction: achievement, recognition, work itself, responsibility, and advancement. Herzberg et al. (1959) noted that if the top five factors are contrasted with the other eleven it becomes evident that the top five focus on the job itself: "(1) doing the job, (2) on liking the job, (3) on success in doing the job, (4) on recognition for doing the job, and (5) on moving upward as an indication of professional growth" (pg. 63). It is noted that factors focused on the characteristics of the job rarely bring about job satisfaction, such as working conditions, and supervision. "This is the basic distinction. The satisfiers relate to the actual job" (Herzberg et al., 1959, p. 63).

### **Alderfer's Existence, Relatedness, and Growth Theory (E.R.G.)**

Clayton Alderfer (1972) offered another perspective on motivation and satisfaction. Alderfer's work is seen as an extension to Maslow's findings. Alderfer conceded, "Maslow's theory of human motivation has provided a number of concepts which have been highly influential in the thinking of investigators who have concerned themselves with human motivation in organizational settings" (Alderfer, 1972, p. 2). However, Alderfer's (1972) theory expands upon Maslow's findings by breaking down human needs into three categories: Existence, Relationships, and Growth. Alderfer postulated that more than one need may be present at a time.

**Existence.** Existence needs correspond to the physiological desires as addressed by both Maslow (1999) and Herzberg et al. (1959), but Alderfer also expanded this category to include items such as "pay, fringe benefits, and physical working conditions" (p. 9). Alderfer (1972) further explained "One of the basic characteristics of existence

needs is that they can be divided among people in such a way that one person's gain is another's loss when resources are limited" (p. 9).

**Relatedness.** Relatedness is rooted in the basic assumption that people "need" other people to feel satisfied. "One of the basic characteristics of relatedness needs is that their satisfaction depends on a process of sharing or mutuality. People are assumed to satisfy relatedness needs by mutually sharing their thoughts and feelings" (Alderfer, 1972, p. 10).

**Growth.** The "growth" component appears to be correlated with what Maslow (1970) defined as "self actualization." In this stage, individuals seek to improve themselves and make creative decisions to enhance either themselves or the environment. "Satisfaction of growth needs comes from a person engaging problems which call upon him to utilize his capacities fully and may include requiring him to develop additional capacities" (p. 11-12). In this stage, individuals experience the highest level of fulfillment and satisfaction.

The E.R.G. Theory is based on seven major propositions. They are identified by Alderfer (1972):

*P1. The less existence needs are satisfied, the more they will be desired.*

*P2. The less relatedness needs are satisfied, the more existence needs will be desired.*

*P3. The more existence needs are satisfied, the more relatedness needs will be desired.*

*P4. The less relatedness needs are satisfied, the more they will be desired.*

*P5. The less growth needs are satisfied, the more relatedness needs will be desired.*

*P6. The more relatedness needs are satisfied, the more growth needs will be desired*

*P7. The more growth needs are satisfied, the more they will be desired (pg. 13).*

The uniqueness of Alderfer's model is that more than one need may be influential at any time. One need does not require fulfillment before a different need is addressed. His model is seen as a continuum of needs.

### **Alfie Kohn**

Unlike the works of Maslow (1970), Herzberg et al. (1959), and Alderfer (1972) that focus on the root of motivation, Kohn (1993) focused on motivation as it is related to individual performance. His work aligned with the writing of Foerester and Martinez (2006) who found, "employees are motivated by self-interest..." (p. 79). Kohn (1993) reported motivation is derived from setting "up certain conditions that will maximize the probability of their developing an interest in what they are doing and removing the conditions that function as constraints" (p. 181).

Kohn (1993) offered several suggestions for cultivating motivation based on his findings. Kohn found the following three actions increase motivation: abolish incentives, reevaluate evaluation, and create the conditions for authentic motivation (Kohn, 1993, p. 182-187).

**Abolish Incentives.** Compensation as a motivator has been a topic of debate. Herzberg et al. (1959) suggested pay can decrease motivation. Shieh (2008) reported his



findings based on the study of directors, managers, and staff of 600 Taiwanese businesses in China. Shieh (2008) stated, “Compensation is a motivational tool which should support high performance” (p. 830). However, Shieh noted, “Exterior money motivation can significantly raise effect, but does not necessarily last long” (pg. 830). Kohn (1993) emphasized that the problem is not money or being paid for a task, but that the task must be “decoupled” from the compensation. “This happens when people are paid equitably and then the focus turns to doing good work” (p. 182-183).

**Reevaluate Evaluation.** Kohn (1993) considered evaluations as an extension of merit pay or increased compensation. From his findings, he reported that current evaluation practices decrease motivation. Kohn’s findings expanded upon the work of Gabor (1990) who indicated evaluation tools decrease motivation and “may actually be an indicator of overall reliance on fear in an organization” (p. 124). Furthermore, evaluation tools can be seen as an external reward or punishment, which can impede internal motivation. Deci, Koestner, and Ryan (1999) proposed from their studies that external motivators such as rewards decrease intrinsic motivation.

Kohn (1993) said that current evaluation practices create a climate in which “employees are made to feel like failures if they are not upwardly mobile” (p. 184).

**Create the Conditions for Authentic Motivation.** According to Kohn (1993), “If motivation and productivity are in short supply in our workplaces, this may just have something to do with the way workers are treated” (p. 186). In the study, *Boosting morale and improving performance in the nursing setting*, Stapleton, Henderson, Creedy, Cooke, Patterson, Alexander, Haywood, and Dalton (2007) examined job satisfaction and motivation within the field of nursing. They found that nurses reported a high level of

satisfaction and motivation when they feel they are “valued members of a learning environment, the possibility of achievement seems realistic, they have experienced success, and have assistance in critiquing their own work to address strengths and weaknesses” (p. 813-814).

Kohn (1993) stated a catalyst for motivation is collaboration. Collaboration increases the chances of success. Experiencing success fosters internal motivation (Stapleton et al., 2007).

“Choice” is another criterion in creating internal motivation in the work place. “We are most likely to become enthusiastic about what we are doing—and all else being equal, to do it well—when we are free to make decisions about the way we carry out a task” (Kohn, 1993, p. 192). Spector (1997) concurred with these findings and reported that autonomy in completing tasks and the potential to impact the organization on a larger scale give individuals a sense of control. Job satisfaction is associated with this freedom of choice and perceived control (p. 43-44).

“Content” is the final category identified by Kohn (1993) in regard to creating conditions for authentic motivation. Kohn (1993) reported that in order to feel intrinsic motivation individuals must feel that their work has meaning. “The central point remains: for people to care about their work, it is necessary to attend to what that work consists of—the content, not merely the context of a job” (p. 44). Spector (1997) reported on the importance of role clarity and the absence of role conflict. Edwards, Bell, Arthur, and Decuir (2008) studied the relationship between job satisfaction and task and contextual performance. Employees in a manufacturing plant completed measures of job satisfaction and their supervisors completed measures of task and contextual job

performance. Their findings indicated that individuals find enjoyment and experience job satisfaction when the content of their work allows them to be challenged and to feel accomplishment. Overall job satisfaction was directly related to task and contextual performance.

### **Job Satisfaction**

Job satisfaction and motivation are connected. Before individuals can be satisfied at higher levels or in their jobs they first must have their basic needs met (Maslow, 1954; Herzberg et al., 1959; Alderfer, 1972). Ducharme and Martin (2000) reported psychological distress, anxiety, depression, powerlessness, alienation and burnout as effects of job dissatisfaction. Job satisfaction is the fulfillment of basic needs and the attempted or actual acquisition of higher needs.

Satisfaction concerns the outcome of an event between a person and his environment. It refers to the internal state of a person who has obtained what he was seeking and is synonymous with getting and fulfilling. Because satisfaction involves interaction with a person's environment, its assessment (for both the person and a researcher) hinges in part on the objective nature of a person's external world. Satisfaction depends both upon the way the world "actually" is and how this reality is perceived by the person (Alderfer, 1972, p. 7).

In order to obtain satisfaction and reinforce aspirations, satisfaction must come from the performance of the task (Herzberg et al., 1959). Herzberg et al. (1959) described these "job factors" as the "motivators" in his Motivation versus Hygiene Theory. The "extra job factors" are referred to as "factors of hygiene." It is the "motivators" that bring about positive job attitudes and job satisfaction (p. 114).

Herzberg et al. (1959) expanded upon this point: “The conditions that surround the doing of the job cannot give him this basic satisfaction; they do not have this potentiality” (p. 114). Herzberg et al.’s (1959) findings in relation to job satisfaction are summarized in the following passage:

“When our respondents reported feeling happy with their jobs, they most frequently described factors related to their tasks, to events that indicated to them that they were successful in the performance of their work, and to the possibility of professional growth” (p. 113).

Most research is in agreement that rewards do not significantly impact job satisfaction. However, Eisenberger, Pierce and Cameron (1999) reported, “reward can decrease, have no effect, or increase intrinsic motivation depending on its method of presentation” (p. 677). Rehman, Khan, Ziauddin, and Lashari (2010) reported in their exploration of the relationship between work rewards and job satisfaction that job satisfaction is related to extrinsic rewards.

Herzberg et al.’s (1959) findings; however, are consistent with the majority of the existing body of research on job satisfaction. Edward’s et al. (2008) findings reiterated that job satisfaction comes from the relationship between task and contextual performance. Halbesleben and Wheeler (2008) related both job performance and satisfaction to job embeddedness. They proposed this link is further illustrated by examining employees’ intent to leave a particular position. Halbesleben and Wheeler (2008) reported that both engagement and embeddedness have significant relationships with turnover intention. Furthermore, they added, “The link between engagement and turnover stems from high levels of investment in and dedication to work” (p. 246-247).

Isen and Reeves (2005) reported similar findings in regard to the relationship between “positive affect” and job satisfaction. “Positive affect also enhances people’s experiences of interest enjoyment, and sense of satisfaction derived from the activity, during their actual engagement with the task” (p. 297-299). Job satisfaction is also increased when individuals feel their skills are a good fit for the position and the job requirements are in line with their perceived skills (Kalleberg, 1977). Spector (1997) related freedom within the position to job satisfaction. Satisfaction is also a correlate of hope and general self-efficacy (Duggleby, Cooper and Penz, 2009).

### **Leaders of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

“Leadership” is a word on everyone’s lips. The young attack it and the old grow wistful for it. Parents have lost it and police seek it. Experts claim it and artists spurn it, while scholars want it. Philosophers reconcile it (authority) with liberty and theologians demonstrate its compatibility with conscience. If bureaucrats pretend they have it, politicians wish they did. Everybody agrees that there is less of it than there used to be (Bennis and Nanus, 2007, p. 1).

Leadership is essential. Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) reported a meta-analysis that shows the statistical impact that good leadership has in the educational environment. Covey (2004) identified the habits of highly effective people. Fullan (2007 & 2008) examined leadership from the perspective of “change.” Reeves (2009) noted that “change leadership” is the single greatest challenge facing organizations. Bennis and Nanus (2007) and Kouzes and Posner (2007) influenced the understanding of effective leadership.

Bennis and Nanus (2007) identified how leaders have failed to create vision, meaning and trust, and that leaders have failed to empower others. They identified common factors that all leaders encounter; including resistance to change, the requirement to broker to the needs of constituencies inside and outside their organizations, and responsibility for establishing the ethics and values for their organizations.

Bennis and Nanus (2007) provided the following leadership framework:

1. Attention through vision
2. Meaning through communication
3. Trust through positioning
4. Deployment of self through positive self regard (p. 25).

Based on this framework, leadership is not something that is available only to a select group of uniquely talented individuals. Instead, “Leadership seems to be the marshaling of skills possessed by the majority but used by the minority” (p. 25). In essence, it is something that anyone can obtain.

Kouzes and Posner (2007) provided five essentials to good leadership in addition to what has been coined the “10 commandments.” Their framework consists of the following:

1. Model the way
  - a. Clarify values by finding your voice and affirming shared ideals.
  - b. Set the example by aligning actions with shared values.

2. Create a shared vision
  - a. Envision the future by imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities.
  - b. Enlist others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations.
3. Challenge the process
  - a. Search for opportunities by seizing the initiative and by looking outward for innovative ways to improve.
  - b. Experiment and take risks by constantly generating small wins and learning from experience.
4. Enable others
  - a. Foster collaboration by building trust and facilitating relationships.
  - b. Strengthen others by increasing self-determination and developing competence.
5. Encourage the Heart
  - a. Recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence.
  - b. Celebrate the values and victories by creating a spirit community (p. 26).

Covey (2004), a researcher on success, reviewed 200 years of literature while earning his doctorate. He noted that effective people exhibit similar characteristics.

Covey (2004) identified the following habits of effective individuals:

1. Be proactive

2. Begin with the end in mind
3. Put first things first
4. Think win/win
5. Seek first to understand, then to be understood
6. Synergize
7. Sharpen the Saw

### **The Superintendency**

No position requires a more motivated leader than the position of the superintendent. Superintendents are educational leaders, motivators, and at times adaptive to whatever role is needed to move a school district forward.

#### **The role of the superintendent**

Now more than ever, the work portfolio of America's school superintendents is increasingly diverse: they are responsible for student progress and achievement while balancing the diversification of their student and staff populations, the explosion of technology and the digital divide, an expanded set of expectations and involvement from the federal level, the media, and board and community relations, all in the context of an increasingly globalized education system (Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, & Ellerson, 2010, p. xiii).



The changing role of the 21<sup>st</sup> century superintendent is a prominent topic (Kowalski, et al., 2010; Cambron-McCabe, Cunningham, Chan, Pool, & Strickland, 2001; Sullivan & Shulman, 2005; Andero, 2001; and Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000).

According to the public Agenda report, *Trying to Stay Ahead of the Game* (2001), 69% of superintendents believe that with the right leadership any school district, even the most troubled, can be turned around and experience success (Farkas, Johnson, Duffett, Foleno, & Foley, p. 7). Based on a survey of more than 800 superintendents, Farkas et al. (2001) reported the nation's superintendents all exude confidence that their impact makes a difference. "In short, school leaders think leaders count" (p. 7). Leaders are asked to do more now. Superintendents have many roles. "Rather than just being an irritant, managing politics, school boards, complaining parents and other special interests appear to have become so normal to administrators that it is now part of the very definition of their role" (Farkas et al., 2001, p. 9). Superintendents reported that legal issues and litigation, parents with complaints and special interests, collective bargaining or other union issues, and dealing with funding and budgeting required more of their time than should be expected (Farkas et al, 2001).

The following table from Chan et al. (2001) illustrates how superintendents spend their time.

**Table 2**


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*Superintendents Reported Use of Time*

<u>Area of Activity</u>	<u>% of Time</u>
General district management	40
Curriculum/instruction	20
Other activities	15
Community-related activities	10
Personal matters	10
Student/extracurricular activities	5

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*Chan et al. (2001).*

Holloway (2001) found nine job domains essential to being a superintendent.

These domains were:

fostering school board relations; developing and maintaining an effective school district staff; facilitating student learning; collaborating with and involving the community; providing organizational resources and operations; developing, implementing, and evaluating curriculum and instruction; providing professional development for school and district staff; maintaining group processes; and understanding and responding to the larger political issues (p. 84).

Andero (2001), King (2002), and Grogan (2002) discussed how superintendents are becoming more involved in curriculum policy and instructional leadership. Andero (2001) noted superintendents have more influence over curriculum policy than anyone. King (2002) defined superintendents as instructional leaders who “lead learning,” “focus on teaching and learning,” “develop leadership capacity,” “create conditions for

professional learning,” “use data to inform decisions,” and “use resources creatively” (p. 62-63).

Grogan (2002) discussed the evolution of the superintendency.

The principalship and superintendency have gone through considerable evolution since they were first established. The superintendency, dating from the mid-1800s, was the first of the two positions to be established. The school principalship did not emerge as a formal role until the 1920s. By 1890, superintendents were found in all large cities, although small cities and towns did not have a superintendent until the 20<sup>th</sup> century (p. 234).

The position initially was task oriented but gradually gained an instructional focus (Grogan, 2002). Superintendents have also been seen as financial managers of schools. The publication of *A Nation at Risk* (1983) focused the nation’s attention on public education. As a result of the publication, superintendents lost power and state and local bureaucracies gained more control (Grogan, 2002). “Superintendents today are seen as the key players in schools and school districts that are called on to manage themselves through collaborative, pedagogical, or distributed notions of leadership that focus the role as leader of an instructional team” (Grogan, 2002, p. 243).

*In The Superintendents Field Book: A Guide For Leaders of Learning* Cambron-McCabe, Cunningham, Harvey, and Koff (2005) reported seven areas essential to being successful in the modern role of the superintendent. The seven areas are:

- Superintendents must lead.
- Superintendents provide a governance structure.

- Superintendents understand and are involved with standards and assessment.
- Superintendents are cognizant of race and class within their district.
- Superintendents develop their principals.
- Superintendents collaborate.
- Superintendents build relationships with all stakeholders (Cambron-McCabe et al. (2005).

In the most recent and comprehensive study on the superintendency, *The American School Superintendent: 2010 Decennial Study* Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, & Ellerson (2010) stated the following:

As the leaders and spokespeople of America's public schools, superintendents play a key role in local, state, and federal policy discussions and decisions, the very dialogues that ultimately impact and shape the future of public education (p. xiii).

The findings of the study illustrated that respondents believed their school boards expected them to be effective communicators, managers, instructional leaders, statesmen/democratic leaders, and applied social scientists. Furthermore, the findings indicated that superintendents must understand the social, educational, and professional needs of the position ( Kowalski et al., 2010).

## Demographics of the Superintendency

The demographic make up of individuals within the superintendency is continuing to change. Glass, Bjork, and Brunner (2000) reported changes in gender and race, age, and career path. In 2008, the *American Association of School Administrators* published their findings in a mid-decade study led by Sutton, Jobe, and McCord. Kowalski et al. (2010) provided the most recent findings.

**Gender.** Blount (1998) reported that in 1982 only 1.2% of the superintendents were women. Glass et al. (2000) reported the percentage to be 13.2%. Sutton et al. (2008) reported the percentage of female superintendents to be nearly 22% and Kowalski et al. (2010) reported the percentage to be approximately 24%.

**Race/Ethnicity.** Individuals of color have faced many obstacles in assuming the superintendency. This “barrier” is evident when examining the number of people of color who ascend to the position. Glass et al. (2000) reported that people of color comprised merely 5% of the people in the superintendency. Kowalski et al. (2010), reported that number increased slightly to 6%.

**Age.** During the years 2000-2010, the average age of individuals in the superintendency changed. In 2000, Glass et al. reported only 9.8% of superintendents were under the age of 46 years. In 2010, Kowalski et al. reported this statistic to be 14.6%. In 2000, 8% of superintendents were over the age of 60 (Glass et al., 2000). In 2010, 18.1% were over the age of 60 (Kowalski et al., 2010).

In 2000, The American Association of School Administrators issued the report *Career Crisis in the School Superintendency: The results of a national survey*. The

findings illustrated that there is a crisis in attracting educators into the profession, but that once within the field, superintendents do not leave the profession. Movement within the profession is commonplace. Eighteen percent of superintendents expressed interest in large urban districts while 93% of superintendents expressed being attracted to districts similar to where they currently work (Cooper, Fusarelli, and Carella, 2000).

Kowalski et al. (2010) reported, “Only about half (51%) of the respondents said that they planned to still be a superintendent in 2015” (p. xv). Only 18.8% of superintendents plan on being a superintendent at a different district in five years. “This finding suggests that the number of current superintendents who will seek to change employers in order to remain in the position (i.e., career-bond superintendents) is rather limited” (Kowalski et al., 2010, p. 23). Nearly 32% of respondents indicated the desire to remain in their current position. Surprisingly, only one respondent, .1% of the population in the study indicated the desire to become a college or university administrator (Kowalski et al., 2010).

### **State of the Superintendency**

The present state of the superintendency appears to be unstable at best. Studies report the lack of qualified professionals to fill the projected openings for the superintendency. In 2000, Cooper et al. reported their findings in *Career Crisis in the School Superintendency: The results of a national survey*. Ninety-one percent of superintendents agreed, “My work in the district has given me real career satisfaction” (pg. 5). However, only 65% of superintendents would recommend the position to others, and “88% of superintendents polled agreed that the ‘shortage of applicants for the superintendents job is a serious crisis in American education’” (Cooper et al., 2000, pg.

4). In 2000, superintendents reported finding the work challenging and rewarding, but over 90% indicated a concern about the high turnover rates and how quality candidates will be recruited to the position (Cooper et al., 2000).

The American Association of School Administrators (AASA) conducted a survey in 2007 that served as a follow up to the 2006 *State of the American School Superintendency Mid-Decade Study*. The new study showed the following concerning information:

Eighty-five percent of the superintendents surveyed believe an inadequate supply of educational leaders exists to fill the anticipated superintendent openings in the near future (Sutton, Jobe, McCord, Jordan, & Jordan, 2008, p. 1).

### **Satisfaction in the Superintendency**

Superintendents according to Glass et al. (2000), Sutton et al. (2008), and Kowalski et al. (2010) reported great satisfaction in their jobs. Glass et al. (2000) reported that although superintendents are in stress-riddled positions, they report a high degree of satisfaction. “Fifty-six percent feel a ‘considerable’ fulfillment in their current position” (p. 12). Additionally, 66% of superintendents indicated that they would recommend the position to others. Glass et al. (2000) concluded that the position of the superintendency is not in a crisis.

In 2001, the American Association of School Administrators published *Career Crisis in the School Superintendency: The Results of a National Survey*. Cooper et al., (2000) reported, “current superintendents find the work challenging, rewarding and

satisfying, particularly in building curriculum, helping students and contributing to society” (p. 4).

Sutton et al. (2008) study reported the following incentives to pursuing the superintendency:

**Table 3**

*Reported Incentives in Pursuing the Superintendency*

<b>Incentives</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>
Making a Difference	1570	74.41
Leading Learning	1093	51.80
Compensation	856	40.57
Addressing Challenges	747	35.40
Building a Team	638	30.24
Managing the Organization	479	22.70
Working with Students	221	10.52
Working with Staff	221	10.52
Promoting Accountability	203	9.62
Prestige	184	8.72

*Sutton et. al (2008).*

Harris, Lowery, Hopson, and Marshall (2004) identified motivation factors for the superintendency. Two hundred thirty-one of 259 superintendents in the sample participated in the study. Table 4 includes the list of motivators. A score of “5” rates the highest possible score and “1” is the lowest.



**Table 4**

*Motivating Factors for Superintendents Deciding to Remain in the Superintendency in Order of Importance*

<u>Motivating Factors</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Std. Deviation</u>
Desire to make a difference	*3.74	.47
Desire to positively impact people	3.71	.47
Professional challenge	3.64	.58
Personal challenge	3.61	.59
Ability to initiate change	3.58	.54
Increased salary and fringe benefits	**3.21	.73
Support and encouragement from others	3.07	.80
Teacher of teachers	3.05	.67
Increased prestige and status	2.05	.82
Relocate to a desired location	1.85	.85

Note. N=226

\*p<.05 by gender

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*Harris, Lowery, Hopson, and Marshall (2004).*

Sharp, Malone, and Walter (2001) surveyed superintendents in Indiana, Illinois and Texas. They reported:

Overall, 41.2% said that their job satisfaction was “very high,” with another 45.4% saying it was “high.” Thus, 86.6% rated their overall job satisfaction as high or very high. At the other end, only 1.6% rated their job satisfaction as low or very low. And when asked if they had it all over to do again, would they become superintendents, 93.2% said that they would choose their positions again (p. 13).

Many professionals serving in the role of superintendent find it rewarding. In synthesizing the research themes, several domains exist: a) impacting success of the district, b) facing challenges, c) influence and d) compensation (Sharp, Malone, Walter, 2001; Hayes, 2001; Wertz, 2002(a); Sharp, Malone, & Walter, 2002; Lowery, Harris,

Lowery, Hopson, & Marshall 2001; Sharp, 2002; Lowry & Harris, 2003, Sutton et al., 2008).

### **Impacting the success of all students**

Satisfied superintendents find great satisfaction in being instrumental in leading the learning process. Satisfied superintendents believe they can impact the success of all stakeholders. Sutton et al. (2008) noted that impacting the success of all students rated second highest of all incentives of the superintendency. Sharp, Malone, and Walter (2001) reported 81.5% of superintendents find it rewarding that they truly believe they “substantially” impact the direction of the school district and therefore the success or failure of students (p. 11). Sixty point percent cited making a direct difference in teaching and learning as a reward (p. 11). Similar findings were found by Sharp (2002). Sharp, Malone, and Walter (2002) reported that the statement “I thought I could make a difference” was agreed upon by 95% of the participants (p. 11). Superintendents find satisfaction in feeling they have made a difference in the lives of others. Wertz (2002a) noted, “The indirectness of making a difference does not diminish its significance” (p. 17). Harris et al. (2004) surveyed 231 superintendents in Texas. They reported that a significant reward of the superintendency is “making a difference” (p. 115).

### **Facing Challenges**

Superintendents are motivated individuals who are mission driven and find great satisfaction in facing a variety of challenges. Wertz (2002b) stated that superintendents find their “personal best through stress” (p. 21). Wertz (2002b) also reported “overcoming fear creatively” as an incentive. “Every day is very different from the last; almost every hour is different. Sometimes the unknown—the stuff that you fear—makes

it the most exciting” (p. 21). Harris et al. (2004) reported that facing challenges ranks as the third highest motivator (p. 115). Harris et al. (2004) noted, “Superintendents agree that the job is difficult but it’s also valuable, exhilarating, and challenging. It provides opportunities for professional and personal accomplishments” (p. 30). Success-oriented people see obstacles as opportunities to succeed and flourish. Sharp (2002) reported that 60.2% of superintendents identify “daily challenges” as a positive reward.

### **Influence**

Superintendents find their position of influence rewarding both intrinsically and extrinsically. In Sharp (2002), the statement “I like the high visibility that this job has” was identified as a motivator for the position (p. 36). Wertz (2003) noted, “The influence associated with being the superintendent of a school district can build one’s esteem” (p. 19-20). Although prestige and power were identified as rewards, they were not reported to be as significant as the influence superintendents felt they could have on others from their position. Sutton et al. (2008) reported that “Building a team” rated as the fifth highest motivator to serving in the superintendency (p. 6). Sharp (2002) concurred with these findings and reported that 68.1% of superintendents identified “building a team of educators” as a reward (p. 36). Harris et al. (2004) reported similar findings and described it as being the “teacher of teachers” (p. 115). Wertz (2003) noted “Resilient superintendents like bringing people together and organizing efforts to address issues” (p. 18).

### **Compensation**

Compensation serves as an extrinsic reward. The ability for superintendents to retire at an early age may have a direct relationship with the salaries and pension plans

they receive. The statement “The job would provide me financial security” was identified as a motivator to be in the superintendency by 61% of respondents (Sharp, Malone, & Walter, 2007, p. 12). Harris et al. (2004) reported “increased salary and fringe benefits” are rewards for superintendents (p. 115). Sutton et al. (2008) reported, nearly 50% of superintendents in their study cited “compensation” as a motivator to pursue the superintendency (p. 6). Hayes (2001) stated the following:

Average salaries of chief school officers have increased dramatically during the last decade. In a survey conducted during the 1998-1999 school year, the average salary reported among districts of all sizes was more than \$106,000 per year. High –paying suburban districts are now giving salaries that have gone beyond \$200,000 annually (p. 34-35).

Additionally, Hayes (2001) reported, “pension benefits based on these salaries will be very generous” (p. 35). Recently, Ferak and Wynn (2011) posted the salaries of twenty Nebraska superintendents at Omaha.com along with various add-ons. Table 5 summarizes the findings.

**Table 5**

*Salaries of Twenty Nebraska Superintendents*

District	Base	Total \$
Bellevue Public Schools	\$208,845	\$261,677
Bennington Public Schools	\$122,750	\$124,250
Blair Community Schools	\$137,700	\$137,700

Council Bluffs Community School District	\$200,000	\$214,000
Douglas County West	\$131,049	\$146,549
Elkhorn School District	\$192,400	\$204,900
Fremont Public Schools	\$185,293	\$187,793
Grand Island Public Schools	\$234,000	\$234,000
Gretna Public Schools	\$153,000	\$153,349
Kearney Public Schools	\$138,854	\$192,105
Lewis Central Community School District	\$138,854	\$138,854
Lincoln Public School	\$258,671	\$260,291
Louisville Public Schools	\$128,000	\$128,000
Millard Public Schools	\$232,186	\$290,048
Papillion-LaVista	\$209,365	\$209,365
Plattsmouth Community School District	\$132,076	\$132,076
Ralston Public Schools	\$145,000	\$150,800
South Sarpy School District	\$148,000	\$148,000

Westside Community School	\$178,602	\$216,354
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*Ferak and Wynn (2011).*

Research compiled during the last 10 years illustrates that superintendents would choose the same profession if they had it to do all over again (Sharp, Malone, & Walter, 2001, p. 13). Although the job is “high-stress” the ability to impact the success of all stakeholders, the ability to positively utilize a position of influence, the opportunity to face new challenges, and the ability to earn more compensation serve as rewards for superintendents.

In this study, I examined the common characteristics of satisfied superintendents and the components of the superintendency that provide satisfaction.

## **Chapter 3**

### **METHODS**

#### **Tradition of Inquiry**

The purpose of this study was to examine the common characteristics of satisfied superintendents and the components of the superintendency that provide satisfaction.

The central question for this study was: What rewards do satisfied superintendents find in doing their work? The interview protocol containing research questions and sub-questions is included in Appendix A. Specific research questions included:

1. What aspects of the superintendency are satisfying?
2. How do superintendents describe “good days” in the superintendency?
3. What supports exist for individuals in the superintendency?
4. What routines do satisfied superintendents implement to maintain their health?

#### **Qualitative Method**

A qualitative method of inquiry was chosen for this study. I was interested in understanding the common characteristics of satisfied superintendents and in identifying the different components of the position of the superintendency that provide satisfaction. Qualitative research is conducted when a “complex and detailed” understanding of an issue is desired and when the researcher seeks “to understand the contexts or settings in which participants in a study address a problem or issue” (Creswell & Clark, 2007, p. 40). The data were gathered through interviews. Hatch (2002) emphasized that qualitative researchers utilize unique interview strategies in comparison to quantitative

studies. “While traditional quantitative methods generate data through the use of instruments such as questionnaires, checklists, scales, tests, and other measuring devices, the principal data for qualitative researchers are gathered directly by the researchers themselves” (Hatch , 2002, p. 7). Qualitative research is a form of interpretive inquiry. Creswell and Clark (2007) stated that researchers’ backgrounds and prior experiences cannot be separated from their interpretations. Researchers are required to make interpretation from their interview experience (Creswell & Clark, 2007). The study falls within the constructivist paradigm.

The goal of research, then, is to rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation. Often these subjective meanings are negotiated socially and historically. In other words, they are not simply imprinted on individuals but are formed through interaction with others (hence social constructivism) and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individual’s lives” (Creswell & Clark, 2007, p. 21).

I defined the methodology of my study as a case study. Hatch (2002) emphasized that case studies are a unique type of qualitative research that investigate “a contextualized contemporary (as opposed to historical) phenomena within specified boundaries” (Hatch, 2002, p. 30). Creswell and Clark (2007) recognized that respected literature exists that rejects case study as a methodology. However, he stated the following:

Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g.,



observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case-based themes (p.73).

I selected case study because it provides an in-depth understanding of the case and gives a holistic account. “Through reporting many perspectives and recognizing the complexity of several factors in any situation while drafting a bigger picture a more thorough understanding of the problem can be obtained” (Creswell & Clark, 2007, p. 39).

### **Positioning Myself: Research Reflexivity**

I have been involved in multiple capacities within the educational arena during the past eight years. My first year in education at District #145 - Waverly Schools, I developed an English as a Second Language program for both Waverly Junior and Senior High School. During the same year, I served as the coordinator for the Credit Recovery program while coaching both tennis and basketball. The next year I transitioned solely to the high school and taught 9<sup>th</sup> English, American Literature, and College Prep English while continuing to coach. My third and fourth years at Waverly High School I continued to teach and coach but also served as the Area Communications Chair for the Language Arts Department. That same year I assumed the Building Curriculum Specialist position and worked together with the district Curriculum Director in the development, preparation and presentation of our district’s Nebraska Department of Education mandated Reading Portfolio. Additionally, I assumed the position of team leader consisting of four core teachers: math, science, English, social studies. The last two years of my experience at Waverly High School, I served as the Assistant Principal at Waverly High School. Most recently I assumed the position of Superintendent and Principal of Parkview Christian School. In this position, I have initiated district-wide

strategic assessment and improvement practices. A primary focus has been on curriculum revision and incorporating brain-based instructional practices into the classroom. During the past two years, I have been published in Sage Publications *Educational Encyclopedia of Reform and Dissent*, I have served on Sam Houston State's Review Board for the *Graduate Research Journal*, and I have presented at different conferences on educational best practice. My most recent educational experiences have inspired me to examine the incentives of the superintendency.

My experiences in education provided a foundation of knowledge in regard to the multiple components of education. My experiences allowed me to be comfortable in the interview setting with other superintendents. As a peer of the interviewees, I was able to put the participants at ease and share openly. My working knowledge of the superintendency allowed me to encourage participants to expand upon critical points of emphasis and encourage the retrieval of rich, thick data.

### **Sampling Method**

The sample consisted of 21 participants. All were superintendents who were identified as having knowledge in regard to fulfilling the superintendency. Creswell and Clark (2007) noted an understanding of the research problem is essential and therefore purposeful sampling is important. Each participant represented his or her district and shared the rewards of the superintendency he or she experienced through an individual interview. Names of participants were identified by a purposeful sampling technique. Purposeful sampling is that in which "the investigator selects participants because of their characteristics "good informants/participants are those who know the information required, are willing to reflect on the phenomena of interest, have the time, and are

willing to participate” (Spradley, 1979). Purposeful sampling allows for homogenous samples. “Homogenous samples are made up of participants who share common characteristics, and these selection strategies are useful for studying small subgroups in depth” (Hatch, 2002, p. 50). Subjects for this study were identified by their willingness to participate, and their ability to obtain and retain the position of the superintendency. Participants were identified by individuals in the position to evaluate professionals in the position of the superintendent. A letter of invitation was sent to each participant. A phone call followed up each letter and a suitable time and place for a face-to-face interview was agreed upon.

Each participant received a letter (Appendix B) requesting his or her participation in an interview. Each participant signed an informed consent (Appendix C). Data were gathered through individual interviews. Through interviews, participants were able to share stories. “Telling stories is essentially a meaning making process. When people tell stories, they select details of their experience from their stream of consciousness (Seidman, 2006, p. 7). The interview process was guided by best practice as recommended by Creswell and Clark (2007).

To ensure the integrity and confidentiality of the study and meeting all ethical concerns great care was taken to maintain the anonymity of all interviewees. I maintained a list that connects the names of the participants to their corresponding pseudonyms. Data were stored for one year after the interviews in a locked cabinet in the principal investigator’s home office. Informed consent was obtained from all participants (Appendix C). The principle and secondary investigator had access to the tapes. The tapes were transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. I met with the transcriber to

ensure that the transcriptions were accurate, detailed and did not lose the “meaning” of the interview. “A detailed and careful transcript that re-creates the verbal and non-verbal material of the interview can be of great benefit to a researcher who may be studying the transcript a month after the interview occurred” (Seidman, 2006, p. 116). The transcriptionist was asked to sign a confidentiality agreement (Appendix D). There were no identified risks associated with this study. This study received approval on August 16, 2010 by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln (appendix F).

## **Procedures**

### **Data Collection**

Qualitative Data collection is a “series of interrelated activities aimed at gathering good information to answer emerging research questions” (Creswell & Clark, 2007, p. 118). Data were collected through individual interviews. I followed the steps recommended by Creswell and Clark (2007).

1. Identified interviewees based on purposeful sampling,
2. Determined one-on-one interviews were most appropriate
3. Used a digital audio-recording device for interviews,
4. Developed and implemented an interview protocol with 4 research questions and 15 sub questions. The interview took approximately one hour to complete,
5. Refined the interview questions and procedures through pilot testing,

6. Determined a place for conducting the interview that was conducive for audio-recording and limited distractions,
7. Obtained consent from the interviewee to participate in the study. I asked interviewees to complete a consent form for the IRB. I reviewed the purpose of the study, the amount of time needed for the interview, and my plans for using the results of the interview,
8. Stayed to the questions of the interview. I completed the interview within the time specified, was courteous, and offered few questions and advice (p. 132-134).

The tapes were transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. The transcriptionist was asked to sign a confidentiality agreement (Appendix D). All interviews were recorded in entirety unless a participant asked otherwise. It is important as researchers that our participants feel safe and comfortable to share openly and honestly. Creswell and Clark (2007) raised important questions in regard to the interview process:

Are your interviewees able to articulate the forces that interrupt or suppress or oppress them?

Do they erase their history, approaches, and cultural identity?

Do they choose not to expose their history or go on record about the difficult aspects of their lives? (p. 140-141).

Seidman (2006) believed this can be addressed by creating an “I –Thou” relationship in which the participant becomes comfortable and trustworthy of the process. “The

interviewer's goal is to transform his or her relationship with the participant into an 'I-Thou' relationship that verges on 'We' relationship" (p. 96).

### **Ethical Considerations**

"Regardless of the approach to qualitative inquiry, a qualitative researcher faces many ethical issues that surface during data collection in the field and in analysis and dissemination of qualitative reports" (Creswell & Clark, 2007, p. 141). Confidentiality and informed consent are ethical concerns for this study.

### **Potential Field Issues**

Creswell and Clark (2007) reported that interviewing can be troublesome and tiring, especially for inexperienced interviewers. As a novice researcher, I identified several potential field issues. One issue was the ethical concerns that arise from conducting research such as obtaining informed consent and storing data appropriately. Creswell and Clark (2007) noted "Regardless of the approach to qualitative inquiry, a qualitative researcher faces many ethical issues that surface during data collection in the field and in analysis and dissemination of qualitative reports" (p. 141). I ensured that I protected the anonymity of all participants.

Another field issue I encountered was the relationship I have with the participants. Creswell and Clark (2007) noted the importance of reflecting on the existing relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee. I remembered that some participants feel "vulnerable" or "self-protective" when sharing (Hatch, 2002, p. 123).

I also was prepared for any issues regarding equipment. I had an extra recorder and batteries available in case of an emergency. I also occasionally checked the recording

device to ensure it was working throughout the interview.

### **Data Analysis**

“For a case study, as in ethnography, analysis consists of making a detailed description of the case and its setting (Creswell and Clark, 2007, p. 163). Hatch (2002) indicated that “Data analysis is a systematic search for meaning” (p. 148) Interviewing produces large amounts of text and information that must be analyzed (Seidman, 2006, p. 117). I completed an inductive analysis, which moves from specific to general (Hatch, 2002). I adhered to best practice in analyzing the data as recommended by Creswell and Clark (2007, p. 156-157):

1. Create and organize files from data
2. Read through text, making margin notes, form initial codes.
3. Describe the case and its context.
4. Use the categorical aggregation to establish themes or patterns.
5. Use direct interpretation.
6. Develop naturalistic generalizations.
7. Present in-depth picture of the case using narrative, tables, and figures.

As initial codes were found, I referred back to the research purpose and the research questions to ensure they were salient to my study (Hatch, 2002). I established patterns and looked for a correspondence between two or more categories (Creswell & Clark, 2007). I searched “for patterns of meaning in data so that general statements about phenomena under investigation can be made” (Hatch, 2002, p. 161). Hatch (2003) noted

“We are searching for patterns that repeat in the data and for patterns that show linkage among different parts of data” (p. 173). I looked at “a single instance and draw meaning from it without looking for multiple instances” (Creswell & Clark, 2007, p. 163).

Creswell and Clark (2007) noted, “It is a process of pulling the data apart and putting them back together in more meaningful ways” (p. 163). I developed naturalistic generalizations from analyzing the data. Creswell and Clark (2007) defined naturalistic generalizations as “generalizations that people can learn from the case either for themselves or to apply to a population of cases” (p. 163). Naturalistic generalizations allow the researcher to make meaning from complex data. Hatch (2002) reported, “The strength of inductive analysis is its power to get meaning from complex data that have been gathered with a broad focus in mind” (p. 179).

### **Data Reporting**

Several themes emerged from analyzing the data. I initially read through the transcripts before dividing the text into segments of information. I identified and labeled several codes. Overlap and redundancy of codes were reduced. Codes were collapsed into themes. The coding process and identified themes and sub-themes are illustrated in Appendix E. After I identified themes, I reported participant’s actual responses under each appropriate sub-theme and theme. At times, it was necessary to add words to complete the intended thought of a participant. Added words were placed in parenthesis and italicized. Extra caution was used to ensure that the added or deleted words did not alter or change the meaning or context of participants’ responses. Ellipses were used when writing up the results when parts of a participant’s response were “unusable” or distracted from the meaning of the response. Disregarded material did not alter or change



the meaning of the participants' response. Stake (1995) presented an outline for reporting data that is recommended by Creswell & Clark, 2007). The researcher does the following:

1. Opens with vignette.
2. Identifies the issue, the purpose, and the method of the study so the reader learns about how the study came to be, the background of the writer, and the issues surrounding the case.
3. Provides extensive description of the case and its context.
4. Presents a few key issues, so that the reader can understand the complexity of the case.
5. Issues are probed further. The researcher presents confirming and disconfirming evidence as issues are probed further.
6. Presents assertions.
7. Closes with vignette (p. 195-196).

I choose not to open and close with vignettes.

### **Limitations**

My inexperience as an interviewer was one limitation in this study. I was conscious to keep the dialogue focused on the goal of the interview. As interesting information was presented, I was aware that I may become too specific with my questions. The pilot interview showed that I had a tendency to fill moments of silence with words such as "um" and "okay." Following the interview protocol was more

beneficial and honored my participants' time and reason for participating. Eliminating "fillers" helped the participants relax and not feel rushed.

Another limitation for me as a researcher was the accrued cost of research. Seidman (2006) notes, "Interviewing research takes a great deal of time and, sometimes, money" (p. 12). I limited the amount of money I spent in lodging by planning in advance and arranging alternative and free lodging.

My inexperience with qualitative data analysis was another limitation. I relied on guidance from the secondary investigator's vast experience to help me in the process. I also read examples of quality qualitative research to help familiarize myself with data analysis.

## **Chapter 4**

### **FINDINGS**

#### **Motivation to Obtain the Superintendency**

The first theme identified was motivation. Participants had motivation to obtain the superintendency. Encouragement from others, large scale impact, natural progression, and facing challenges were identified as sub-themes.

#### **Encouragement to Obtain the Superintendency**

Several superintendents noted they were motivated to pursue the superintendency due to encouragement from their mentors or colleagues and/or by the modeling their mentors provided.

One participant stated,

The superintendent and assistant superintendent came into my office, and they said, we think you should be the assistant superintendent here. I thought why? I love what I am doing. I mean, are you saying that I am not doing a good job as a principal? They said we just thought you are probably thinking about being a superintendent when you see your peers going off and doing the same thing. The next year, the assistant superintendent retired and the superintendent asked me to step into the position.

A different participant recalled being asked to interview. He said,

In '99 our superintendent retired, and the board asked me to be the

superintendent.

Another participant shared a similar story,

I had my superintendent talk to me about it. I was actually a high school principal here in this district. He was getting close to retirement age, and said he saw some qualities in me that he thought would serve me well as a superintendent. So that is how I got started. I hadn't given it a lot of thought before then.

Another participant shared the impact of his mentor. He said,

Dan was certainly one of those people (who motivated him to the superintendency). When I got my doctorate and was a practicing principal, he told me to look at some of those options. One thing led to another and here I am.

One superintendent expressed how she was surprised when she was asked to fulfill the position of the superintendent,

My path to the superintendency was just a little different. Leadership has always been something I've been interested in, and we had a long-time superintendent that was retiring. The board was asking to talk with folks, I actually thought that my visit was because I had 30 some years in the district and they were just looking to talk to me about what the goals of the districts are. I would do anything for the district. I would do anything to help the district move forward, and, they asked me to be the superintendent.

One participant recalled his superintendent coming to him with news of his retirement,

Two years into my previous job, my superintendent indicated that he was going to retire. He encouraged me to start a program. The minimum number of hours was 15 at that time. I got those in and they moved me up into the superintendent's role.

Another participant commented on the encouragement he received to obtain the superintendency,

In large part, it was people around me encouraging me to go into the superintendency. I taught for 16 years and enjoyed teaching. I had a principal that encouraged me to go into the principalship, and he was the same person that eventually became a superintendent and said, "I think you should be a superintendent."

One participant recalled encouragement from his colleagues,

I was talking to some colleagues who were already in that role and it allowed me to realize that the superintendency is something I might be able to do. I certainly was interested in that piece of it. I was not sure whether my skills or abilities would be able to rise to that level, but I think their encouragement and support added some clarity.

One participant remembered the encouragement of her husband,

I was at another district and my husband actually encouraged me to keep going and get a superintendent's degree. I applied for a late opening just to see what the interview process would be like and I was offered the job... I really think I have found my niche.

Another participant commented,

Our superintendent was leaving to become the commissioner of education. It was a midterm situation. He always saw me as being the next superintendent. I didn't. I talked to the board about it and my family because it was going to be a change that would impact them and here I am.

Two superintendents recalled that having a bad mentor encouraged them to obtain the superintendency,

What motivated me at the time was that I was working for three incompetent men in a row and I figured that I could do at least as good as they were doing and I figured the superintendency is probably the best position to make the biggest impact. I went back to school and one evening the school board met me in my living room and said, "We are going to get rid of the guy we have and we want you to take the job." I have been on a run ever since.

Another participant stated,

I worked for a superintendent that I thought didn't do a very good job and I went home upset one day and I told my wife I was going to go back to school and be the superintendent so I could be the boss.

## **Large Scale Impact**

Superintendents identified the potential to have impact on an entire community and organization as motivation to obtain the superintendency. This was defined as having a large-scale impact. Following are comments they made:

I think the primary motivation for me was just the sense that we need to make sure that all of our kids get the best possible education. In our district we have about 50% free and reduced lunch. School is the best chance for them to have a different life. And, I just feel it's almost a calling that we have to be the institution that helps them broaden their horizons and to help them see a different life and become productive citizens. I think if our country is going to continue to be a leader in this world and a place for the kind of freedom we've enjoyed, we have to have people going forth that are productive citizens. I really think that is important. That really drives everything that I do. How does it affect kids' learning? How does it affect their lives? How do we interact with families to make a better situation for kids? Down the road, those kids are going to be parents, and we want them to be functioning families.

I've made it a point to practice what I was preaching to young people and that is to always be a life-long learner. And, the more you are exposed to (the more) you understand. It was that attraction in education itself, in the decision-making, the policy, creating a culture, a climate that would afford...an English teacher or a guidance counselor, to do their best work. I was very quickly led to understand that a lot of that was due to policy making. A lot of that was due to the culture within an organization that would allow educators to do the important work, day

in and day out. I also learned early on that as the issues in our society, our economy, whatever the issues might be, that the role and responsibility of the policymaking body was to ensure the sanctity of a classroom regardless of the tragedies that were befalling families or the challenges of a nation. I committed early on to preserving the integrity and the sanctity of classrooms, and felt I could best do that in the role of the superintendent.

I felt that I could do a good job as a superintendent, have a bigger impact on what was happening in the school and have a chance to be the leader that could set the course to make sure things get done.

I realized that if I wanted to have some autonomy and a real impact on delivery of services to kids – the way in which the design of the system actually functions for students – that the best way to do that was to be an administrator. I think people who get into the superintendency are probably more drawn by the global aspects of education. I was intrigued by and loved education as far as English in particular went and literature and reading and so forth, but to me it's a much bigger challenge and opportunity to say, "This encompasses everything." The superintendency encompasses everything.

One participant recalled his desire to lead a system,

My primary motivation was to see if I can lead change at scale. I've worked at different levels in the different school systems, as a building leader, as kind of a district leader, and as a school teacher. I've always wanted to lead a whole system at scale and see if my ideas hold up in a kind of macro level.



I am a systems thinker and having the opportunity to impact an entire district was probably the biggest motivator. Feeling like I had done the pieces leading up to that, and now wanted a chance to put all the pieces together, and to be able to really have the vision that drives the district forward and then put the pieces in place that cause change to happen. But, (I wanted) to do that on a larger scale.

One participant commented,

I am doing it because I want to do it. But at some point, if I don't get that thrill that keeps bringing me back and if I don't feel I am making a difference than I can be doing a lot of other things with my time.

One superintended said,

It's the opportunity to affect the lives of kids, of staff, (and the) community in such a broad way and also other administrators and teaching positions. That is probably more important because when you get right down to the one-on-one level, it is an opportunity to make sure good ideas, sound decisions and opportunities have an opportunity to be implemented.

One superintendent commented on impacting other administrators, which in turn impacts the entire system,

The impact you have on creating a great work environment for the adults in the system, the impact that you have on a community with the quality of school that you're able to offer and attract families (motivated me to the superintendency).

In regard to impacting other leaders, she said,

Impacting their leadership then translates out into their building.

One superintendent commented on the influence of the superintendency,

The motivation of being a superintendent was to rethink things. I was in the business for 34 years. I retired 2 years and rethought things. The notion of the power that the superintendency has in actually taking education as a system from a place where teaching is the focus to a place where learning is the focus is my greatest motivation.

One superintendent stated, “ I love my job. I don’t know what’s motivating me. I think it’s the belief that I’m making a difference in the lives of children.”

One superintendent said,

The thing that I get up in the morning, and I truly do look forward to getting here everyday, is that I know the work we are doing is impacting, in our case, 3,200 kids and families in the community. Because of the work we do, our community is going to be a better community, a stronger community.

One superintendent reflected on the great privilege of impacting youth,

I’ve always maintained that I’m blessed with an abundance of opportunity and just cannot wait to get to work. I love what I do and I love the people with whom I do it, and I love those with whom I serve. I couldn’t imagine putting hubcaps on Toyotas for 38 years and finding satisfaction. I am aware on a daily basis that the work that we’re able to do with young people, whether it’s teaching English, whether it’s in a guidance office, whatever it might be, that we’re so very fortunate. And, to ever lose sight of the privilege that we have in affecting and

positively impacting the life of youngsters, it is time that individual shouldn't come to work.

A superintendent said,

I think what I do makes a difference. That motivates me. I really think I am committed to living a life of significance or trying to be significant in what I do so that's what motivates me. If I was doing something that I didn't think had any meaning, I don't know how I'd get up and go to work. Getting up and going to work is no problem for me.

A different superintendent commented on what motivated him,

Knowing that what I am doing makes a difference for kids that have been poorly served in the past. And, I was one of those kids so, in many ways, my own difficult educational experience has informed a lot of my leadership decision. I really believe in the notion that all children are precious.

A superintendent commented on her passion for the superintendent's role,

I am passionate about what we are doing. I think it's really important work.

People I work with – my central office team. I would put them up against anybody in the state. And so I know, I have a bunch of people around me that are smarter than me and that is a good thing.

A few superintendents reflected on their impact on all kids. One superintendent stated why he comes to work,

Our mission: to meet the needs of the kids and to do whatever is in my responsibility and power to help that happen (and) to help everyone feel invested

in the district (and) in the programs so that kids benefit. I don't come to work.

I'll say I'm going to school. I've never stopped going to school.

Another superintendent commented on reaching all kids,

We really have to make efforts to reach every kid. And I understand failure, and human beings fail all the time. What keeps me going is recognizing that we've have to get better and better at meeting the needs of individual kids. For me, it's just the notion of the strong belief that I can make a difference for that one kid in a classroom that's struggling.

One superintendent said,

You know, I've never had a problem getting up and coming to work. I think I have the best job in the world. Most people wouldn't like this job. No two days are the same. The number one factor is to get to work with students and get to have a piece in their development.

Superintendents recognized the responsibility that comes with a position that can have large-scale impact.

One superintendent stated what motivated him to come to work each day,

Diversity in what the day's going to look like. A need to accomplish certain things and a realization that there's some people in the district that kind of count on me being here.

A participant stated,

If you look at my Gallup strengths, responsibility is one of them and so I feel that sense of, you know, you have to be out there. The motivating part of that is I believe in what we are doing.

Another participant said,

One thing that goes along, at least for me, with this job, is an intense sense of responsibility. And, I don't tend to do things halfway. I get up in the morning thinking about what I'm going to do, and I go to bed thinking about what I'd better do and not do. I wake up in the middle of the night thinking about it and some of that may not be good. I come to work the next day because I am expected to and other people are depending on me to do that. The biggest motivator for me is just that intense sense of responsibility to our district.

### **Natural Progression**

Superintendents commented that their ascension to the superintendency seemed to follow a natural progression. Many participants indicated that the superintendency was the logical next step in their careers. Following are comments they made:

I enjoyed teaching and coaching as I did that for 11 years. I had excellent building administrators and wanted to pursue that. I was in a 4A school in Kansas which would be a C school in Nebraska. I moved up and finished my program and got a position as a building principal in a 1A school which is the smallest of schools. It was about 280 kids and I was the principal and athletic director.... They (the school board) moved me up to the superintendency.

It was kind of a natural progression. I started out as a Special Education teacher and I worked with a lot of behavior disorder students so I was around the discipline aspect quite a bit. The organization of the administration lured me into that. My first job was at a small K-12 school. We were a D2 school out in central Nebraska. I was there for 5 years. The first three, I was K-12 principal and through that I worked closely with the superintendent. I had a part-time superintendent that was shared between two districts the first two years and the third year I had a retired superintendent that came back out of retirement. I was doing a lot of the day-to-day budgetary items anyway. Standards and assessment were just coming out and he wanted no part of that, and I don't blame him. He had been retired and that wasn't what he was in education for so it naturally led into the last two years where I served as the K-12 principal and superintendent.

One superintendent referred to the natural progression as an "accident,"

Well, I accidentally became superintendent. I was a Special Ed. Director in a reservation school at Macy Omaha Nation. And, through some unethical practices by the city and superintendent he was removed, and I was asked to take the position and took it. That is how I got started.

One superintendent recalled that he did not seek the superintendency,

I always wanted to be a principal from early on in my educational career. Quite frankly, I had decided I was going to be a career principal. In the 34 years I have experienced in education 25 of them have been as a high school principal. I have 5 years in as an assistant superintendent, but to tell you the truth, during most of those 25 years, I was the happiest I've ever been in my life. I absolutely love the

high school principal's job. I wasn't looking for anything beyond that quite frankly.

One superintendent recalled the set of circumstances surrounding his ascension to the superintendency,

It was just the set of circumstances. In my own district, a district I've worked at 20 years, (I) kind of rose and it just seemed like the purpose I had at the time. I was supposed to become superintendent. It was one of the few times in my professional career when I felt like I had a real clear purpose.

Another participant said,

I don't know that I ever thought as a kid when I grow up I want to be a superintendent. Even when I started the profession that wasn't something I ever aspired to or sought, or saw myself moving in that route. You know, I think as I moved through the classes in administration and then became an administrator and assistant principal and then a principal it (was something I strived for). I think I am bit of a nomad, kind of always striving for more – just something really different. I think it is just the way I am wired. Plus, opportunities presented themselves. It is kind of a combination of those things. There was certainly never an epiphany that took place that made that happen. I think it was a combination of things I was doing and opportunities that presented themselves.

One participant said,

I never planned on being a superintendent. It was the farthest thing from my mind. When I came to (school district) I wanted to be the best band director I could possibly be and the opportunity (to be a superintendent) came along

Another superintendent said,

It's something I could see myself doing and continuing to grow in. I think it's sort of a job that demands perpetual growth and it also challenges. I find it fascinating that it would challenge me to reinvent myself repeatedly because aside from those fundamentals of mission and purpose, the way in which we do things and how we deliver services and how we handle all the logistics of pre K –12 education are always subject to revision. They need to be changed based on what our current best practice is and what the research is telling us. So continuing on to be a superintendent would give me the opportunity to be able to kind of perpetually renew myself as an educator.

### **Facing Challenges**

Several respondents identified “facing challenges” as a motivating component of the superintendency. Following are comments they made:

One participant recalled what motivated him in the position,

Just the nature of the job itself. There's ups and downs to being a school administrator at any level, that is just the nature of the job. I have just never considered not going. I get 20 vacation days a year and over the course of the last 3 years I think I have taken 6 vacation days total.

One superintendent commented about the challenge of building new facilities,



I enjoy projects and challenges. We've really tried to do a lot with our facilities here in the last few years and get those upgraded. They were pretty ragged conditions when we came four and a half years ago and I feel we are making headway. That has been kind of a continuous program, and I enjoy that part of it.

One superintendent said,

What motivates me moreover as a superintendent and gets me excited and sometimes anxious, but mostly excited are the array of challenges that we have to address. On any given day any issue may present itself. An emerging issue that we're dealing with here recently is food allergy stuff. You know, I didn't get into education thinking I was going to become an expert in food allergies and in nut allergies in particular.

Participants were motivated to obtain the superintendency. Encouragement from others, the ability to have large-scale impact, natural progression, and the desire to make a difference served as motivation to seek the position of superintendent.

## **Chapter 5**

### **FINDINGS**

#### **Extrinsic and Intrinsic Rewards of the Superintendency**

Extrinsic and intrinsic rewards in the position of the superintendency surfaced as a primary theme. Several sub-themes emerged within the theme.

##### **Intrinsic**

Within the theme of intrinsic rewards were the following sub-themes: large-scale impact, influence and prestige, a sense of self-accomplishment and success, interactions with others and time of the year.

##### **Large-Scale Impact**

One participant captured the essence of impacting an entire district,

A good day as a superintendent is a day where we remain focused on mission, purpose, and student learning. We don't have very many days that aren't good days here. I'm really proud of that because I believe that the commitment, that shared commitment, the collective sense of urgency people have about student learning is a really powerful element of our culture.

Other participants made the following comments:

A good moment is understanding and appreciating every moment that whatever is said, whatever is communicated, whatever decision is made, whatever response might be given that it has an impact. When those moments can positively impact, that's a good moment. There are decisions and there are issues along the way

where you certainly understand that the decisions that are being made are detrimental. It's collateral damage from a poor economy. It's collateral damage from a state that has its priorities at least from my perspective, out of balance at times and that doesn't prioritize young people....Being able to take the hand that you're dealt and work within that parameter to do right by young people would be a positive moment.

Do you see that lady over there? I would walk through a wall for her. And when you have somebody that says that, after a year and a half of being with them, you feel like you're making a difference in somebody else's leadership. And in turn now it becomes exponential, because then when you challenge twelve other administrators to choose somebody in their leadership to put their focus on then you see the greater effects of that and how it's not just even your immediate group but it's going to widen-out. From there it widens out. You start to think about how many people you affect over time, and it's pretty staggering.

Knowing you're making a difference....Knowing that you've made a difference and more specifically a difference in a student or students' lives. We try to just pound home the point that our number one mission is student learning.

I got into education because hopefully I wanted to make a difference and the only way you can do that is you understand people's needs. You understand where you are going and try to do everything you can to work your way toward that.

Another superintendent identified the large-scale impact that being a wise steward of finances can have,

I think as a superintendent you're looking more at yearly than day-to-day things such as the establishing a goal of setting aside X amount of dollars. Our finances were in horrible shape at one point in time and seeing how we've grown our cash reserve and more than doubled our cash reserve over a course of three years (has been a reward). You know, you can't do that on a daily, weekly or monthly basis.

Participants described pleasure in goal setting. Following are comments they made:

The strategic goals that we've set out (are rewarding), the goals that I've set out with the board to accomplish and that we review along the way. But at the end of the year to look and know that financially we have made good sound financial decisions that are focused on our kids and families and have put our resources in a good spot is a financial reward.

I have job targets that are set for me by the board. I have a strategic plan that we're working on in the district that has action plans associated with it. So (it's a reward) meeting those things. I think watching progress through data (is rewarding).

I don't want to keep coming back to the same answer, but if I think that I am doing something that's changing the course of this school district for the better that is a reward for me. And sometimes that doesn't happen on a daily basis; sometimes it's very slow in coming. But, if you see you're making progress that is rewarding.

In regard to yearly rewards in the superintendency, one superintendent said,

That's when I really start looking at multiple assessments and student outcomes. Metrics that are more granular. I can see how particular teachers are doing that I know were challenges, and I know how my principals are managing their buildings. There's a lot of indicators if you know how to really dig for the data. Look at attendance rate. All of it is kind of a dashboard, metrics you look at to know you're healthy and growing versus dipping and failings.

One superintendent said,

I think there's significance in the position but far more than the position, the internal rewards are knowing that you can impact what goes on in every classroom in the district, and not that you can, but you do. Hopefully what you're doing is positive.

One superintendent commented on the feeling that comes with making progress,

"Just feeling like you know what, we are making progress here on building a plan in which we're moving from a place where teaching is a focus to a place where learning is a focus."

Another participant added,

If you see something is different because you did something rather than if you hadn't done it. Either the number of kids staying in school changes or a kid stays in school. Maybe that's what's so hard in the superintendency is it's hard to really ever measure did I have an impact.

One superintendent described the rewards of watching kids mature and his part of the process. He said, "The most gratifying is watching kids grow up and mature and go

on and do great things and become great parents and citizens. I think that is the most gratifying to me.”

One superintendent identified what brought him personal satisfaction,

Probably just the satisfaction that my job, my goal, our district’s job and goal is to prepare students for their lives. Do you see that every day on a daily basis? You hope so. But, you know, the collective part is are we going to help prepare them?

One superintendent recalled the importance of leaving a legacy,

I think that, and maybe it’s just because I’m at this point in my life, but recognizing that the things that we’re doing, that I’m leaving something of a footprint for the future (brings satisfaction). I’ve always said that when I leave here I want it to be a better place then what I found it.

One superintendent said,

I think probably the ability, the chance, to be able to make positive changes in a program that affects so many kids. When I was a teacher in the classroom, I was affecting 120, 130 kids a day. When I became principal I was affecting the entire building. But as superintendent, you’re affecting an entire district and that is both a satisfying and daunting responsibility. But, I feel like that is a way to make an impact on so many kids’ lives.

One superintendent commented

I guess the reward I see is that you know that you’re trying to make an impact and do the best that you can for kids and give them the best advantage coming out of high school that you can. And, I think to see the impact that you have on kids at

every grade level and to know that you're doing good things, that's the biggest reward that I've seen in the job. A lot of that's intrinsic. You just know to look at situations and know that you're making a difference.

One superintendent reflected,

I think it goes back again to just knowing that you're making a difference.... I mean to develop a relationship with a young man that came to us as a non-English speaking person and to have him get a full ride scholarship to Northwestern University and to know that his goal some day is to be a senator and to know where he came from. You just watch people. I don't know; it is hard to explain. It is all about watching and seeing other people succeed.

One superintendent discussed the magnification of the affects of her decisions, Your decisions are magnified in terms of their impact on children in ways that you have to appreciate. The intrinsic, any kind of asset, can also be an element of risk. I think for me being in kind of a position to actually make decisions that I'm responsible for and that the whole system has to respond to is powerful. It is also daunting because I have enough sufficient self-doubt to wonder always is this really going to the place it needs to go. I think that kind of responsibility, high level responsibility, is a reward. Some people may mistake it for power but it's really not about that.

One superintendent said, "As I mentioned earlier, just the satisfaction that you're making an impact and doing something right."

One participant responded, “Causing new things to happen that wouldn’t have happened otherwise, had it not been for your leadership.

One superintendent described his view of making a large-scale impact through the attainment of a vision,

I know a lot of people talk about vision. I guess my vision, I would describe is one of an effective school and being able to work every day and to try and push towards that vision and to see in the end result...achievements that some thought were impossible, or weren’t possible at one time. That’s very satisfying to me. That’s what I really like to see is kids achieving, and that I know some of the things that have been put in place to cause kids to achieve. That is probably the most satisfying.

One superintendent identified setting goals,

Setting goals for your school district...Coming into a new school district and you see, okay, this is where they’re at now, and this is where they need to be.

Whether it’s you have some transportations issues, some financial issues, buildings and ground issues, facility things, or personnel issues, you say, okay, now to make this whole thing work. You visualize how you want it to look in one, three, five, and twenty years. It is very satisfying to see over the course of time, putting your mark on it and saying we’ve accomplished this and ultimately it leads to a better educational system for the school district. You can say, I’ve done something that’s going to provide these kids with a better education in the future.



One superintendent commented on her impact on teachers and kids,

Those are the things that drive me, primarily just making the biggest impact on teachers and kids' lives. And I'm always reticent of how much impact I do have on those lives, for better or worse.

One superintendent reflected on a sense of belonging,

The most fulfilling part for me is the sense of belonging to something bigger than the self. That it (success) is through the cooperative or collaborative endeavor of working with a school board and an administrative team. Those are the two smaller collaborative units I work with more directly on an ongoing basis, but then also K-12 staff and actually PK-staff and the community.

One superintendent described the feeling of large-scale impact,

You feel an entire organization move forward. And once you get a taste of that, what it feels like to move a bigger group if you will, or a bigger entity forward, and you see the impact of how that translates back to the classroom, that's what is satisfying to me.

Several superintendents identified the large-scale impact they could have by developing and encouraging others. A superintendent referred to his role as being in the "people business." He said,

The nice thing about what we're doing is we're in the people business. I mean it's not just about kids, it's about parents, it's about teachers, and it's about the culmination of watching something great happen, and just knowing that every day you're making a difference in the life of a child and that you have teachers that

are compassionate, courageous, caring, and motivated to help make that difference.

One superintendent noted her role as a leader of leaders,

I think there's a point where we have to see ourselves as masters of understanding leadership, and that we get it and that now we're applying it. And instead of taking in and trying to get for our own leadership we begin to channel that back out to other leaders. We assume about ourselves that we know what we're doing and then it's time to focus out on everybody else. And so for me, that's been a big change in what I would say is an intrinsic piece, is that now I actually have something to offer because of my experience, not because I have the degrees behind it but because I know what I'm doing and now it's time to help other people get that too.

One participant discussed his desire to put theory into practice,

The internal rewards are the opportunity to keep learning. I said when I came here that after having worked at the university for eight years and then being an associate superintendent, it's kind of like, okay, put your money where your mouth is. Can you really make this happen or do you just tell stories about it?

There aren't too many superintendents that have spent eight years at a university setting talking about theory, talking about practice, researching, writing, and then to say, okay, fine, you did writing about it, now can you make it happen? So it's a reward. It's an internal reward to be able to use knowledge you've gained over the years.

One superintendent said,

I think it all comes back to kids...I don't know about daily rewards, but the rewards of knowing I've spent a lot of my time in high poverty schools as I am right now again. And, to watch kids that their only opportunity out of poverty is education, and they take that opportunity and move forward to do some great things with their lives is by far the greatest rewards that I get as a superintendent.

One superintendent commented on her desire to impact her district in a manner that negates the influence of state and federal mandates,

One of the things that my prior superintendent used to say and it was great; he didn't realize how great it was, but I've taken it. I use it on a weekly basis now. Our goal is to render the state and federal government irrelevant. That's satisfying. When the feds or the state says you have to do this and you can say, been there, done that, and we already have. I hate doing things that feel like you are jumping through hoops. I hate state reports that I'm never sure what they are for. But, if we've already done things and we can say, ah, we already did that, that's rewarding.

A few participants described good days in the superintendency in regard to moving a district forward and moving towards having significant impact. Following are comments they made:

You know, all the pieces to the puzzle are fitting. Whatever it might be. It could be a curriculum initiative, it could be finances, it could be buildings, meetings

with community members, etc. A good day is when you feel like you've made progress in any of those. It might not be to conclusion, but you've made progress.

Another participant said,

Well, maybe you can see that you made a difference. A difference in pushing a project forward or you've made a decision that really mattered and it made a difference in other people's lives.

### **Influence of Position**

Several superintendents identified the influence of their position as being an intrinsic reward. Following are comments they made:

The most satisfying part of being a superintendent is having really strong convictions about student learning, about how schools should operate and really being critical and having a great deal of influence on being able to implement that vision.

It's probably that feeling of significance. The scope of what I do is big. In fact, so many times I'm reminded that it's bigger than I realize. Kids that I meet, even teachers and parents that I meet in the city are somewhat mesmerized by the position.

One superintendent noted her influence on her colleagues,

I've looked more at the leadership that I do as more of a mentor leadership paradigm. And so probably the thing that I enjoy more than anything else is providing opportunities for my principals so that they can make things happen at

the building level and ultimately the impact is on the kids. That's still why I do what I do. I don't work daily with kids, but my daily work impacts kids.

Another superintendent noted,

I think a good moment is when I see people take on aspects of leadership that I hadn't seen in them before. A good example from a recent episode is one of my principals, who's a new principal and is pretty new to the game in lots of respects, had to take a lot of heat from a particularly difficult parent. Three months ago, he wouldn't have handled this well; it would have come right to me to negotiate.

One superintendent expressed his desire to be in control,

If I have to be on a committee; if I have to be there; let me be the chair and in control of some things. I've learned in time that even though as superintendent you have a lot of power, that's not the best way of using it....If you can let the people arrive at the end result on their own it's going to have a lot greater impact than just saying that's it.

Another participant commented about the reward of being the person to "give the final yes or no on something and having something decided."

Participants mentioned being recognized by others because of their position.

They commented the following:

People come up on the street and say it. "You're doing a great job," and pat you on the back. Those things are extremely rewarding and reassuring that you're doing a good job.

Another moment is when a second grader, runs by me at a football game and says, “hi” and knows who I am because they’ve seen me enough times and understand what I do.

Another participant commented on the overwhelming feeling that comes with understanding the level of influence a superintendent has,

A big moment for me last year was when I was up on stage with the graduates coming across for the first time, and when you’re up there addressing an entire gym full of people with all these kids sitting in front of you ready to go out into the world, the impact of the influence that you have just blows your mind.

One superintendent commented, “Well, I think what I enjoy is just having a little hand in the whole entire district.”

Participants noted how their influence also impacted their relationships.

Participants commented on working with their board and administrators. Following are comments they made:

I just think that it (extrinsic rewards) is not near as great as are intrinsic rewards. Like I said, working with the board, working with, I have a great assistant superintendent. I have a great board president. If you value relationships those intrinsic rewards are so much more meaningful.

I think when you see step-changes where people really put change of practice in place and then that shifts their beliefs and then you see an escalation of that trust building. Principals are a pretty conservative group. Most educators don’t want to do something unless it’s a sure fire bet. We’re in a period in our history where

there's not a lot of sure-fire answers. We really do have to construct things that work for kids that are not driven by a manual or textbook or checklist. We have to think our way forward.

Another superintendent commented on the positive feeling of making connections with others.

Yeah, the way I feel after I believe I've made a connection with somebody, especially our administrators, principals and our board members. Making a connection with them in that they are confident in my ability to be a leader.

One participant said,

I'm anxious to build confidence in those who I work with. I really believe that's part of what I do. Bringing confidence to teachers. As we build this plan, they're going to be included. Also, bringing confidence to my administrators that I'm supporting them and giving them something that's a value to them. Confidence to my board members that I'm working with them and bringing confidence that not only are we going to have a plan in which our kids are going to be accountable to our mission but we're going to be able to do that within the resources that are allotted to us.

Another participant commented,

If I go to a staff meeting and see a principal do a better job of leading his or her staff, that's the kind of thing that keeps my fire lit because I can see that a person is doing something differently this week than they would have done last week and it's based on what they've learned.

### **Sense of Accomplishment and Success**

Participants reported feeling a sense of accomplishment and experiencing success as being an important intrinsic reward. Sense of accomplishment and success is a sub-theme under the theme of intrinsic rewards. Following are comments participants made:

I think there's a sense of service there. I get to do something that I don't know that I'm great at everything in the job, but there are some things that I'm good at and so, you have the opportunity to be successful and get some sense of accomplishment... You get a sense of achievement through watching people be successful and I think that sense of service is important.

It just gives me a sense of accomplishment to see basically what I brought in. I brought into the school district a process of strategic planning that we started in 1990 and it has become a part of the fabric of our school district and how we do things, how we plan out for five years, and how we turn those into action plans and then, how do we implement those into site plans that are thirty-six buildings. Then, how do you operationalize that district-wide and make somebody accountable.

I would maintain that it's the sense of accomplishment that's felt when decisions and issues are sorted through that take into account all perspectives and the satisfaction that comes at the end of the day if one can say you've made the right decision and in the best interest of youngsters. That's a wonderful gauge to have



for a lifetime to be fortunate enough to gauge your decision on what's good for young people.

One superintendent identified what brought her intrinsic satisfaction in her position,

Internal is pride. A sense of accomplishment. A sense of development of administrators, teachers, paras and hourly people towards achieving the common goals that we have.

Several participants related their sense of accomplishment with seeing successes in students, teachers, and the organization. They reported the following comments:

One superintendent said, "I guess the number one (reward) is seeing the academic success of students and teachers."

The participant further explained the questions that his district will ask to examine student learning,

Our goal is to know why we didn't score well. Is it something that we're not teaching in the classroom.? Is it something our students aren't gaining? Or is it just the makeup of our study body? And, that all goes to where we set the bar.

One participant reflected on helping others succeed,

Internal rewards are the satisfaction of having our kids succeed. They're internal because you know that you and others have helped success happen and helped kids grow. Success is different for every student, so that is really internal. It's very intrinsic. The monetary award is not something that I've thought about

through my career. So I just know that I have a passion to work in education and be where kids are and other people that are passionate about helping kids enter into the society they need to run in the future.

One superintendent described seeing successes on a daily basis,

Daily rewards are seeing small successes. You know, whether it's kids in the classroom when you walk by and you see the learning that's going on or whether you see it out on a basketball court.

One participant noted the sense of accomplishment felt from continuing to grow, You're going to grow. You're going to grow as a human being. You're going to have to. I don't think anyone's fully prepared when they initially become a superintendent. Through the practice and through what you deal with daily growth is a requirement. You learn more about yourself. You learn more about others. You hopefully have a successful practice and that gives a sense of self-satisfaction. I think those are things that are intrinsic.

One participant commented on seeing the successes of facing the daily challenges, The internal rewards I think, after about twenty to thirty years of this, is the daily challenges of being able to see the results of those challenges and opportunities translating to successes for kids.

One participant discussed the complexity of recognizing rewards in the superintendency,

What I tell folks I work with in my central administrative team is a lot of times there aren't daily rewards in the sense of "atta boys" or compliments or any kind

of what most people consider positive reinforcement. But, I think what keeps me going day-to-day is if I have a sense that the work I am doing has integrity and is aligned with my values and moves me closer to realizing those for my students. That's what keeps my fire burning. So it's kind of a sense of integrity I think. Because in my position you don't get a lot of daily perks. There just aren't. There are weeks, months sometimes you go with out anybody taking note. And if that's what you're in it for, your fire will burn low soon. So it can't be built around immediate rewards.

One superintendent shared her enjoyment of seeing students do amazing things, Well weekly (rewards are), I think the people that you are with and what you see or hear about each and everyday. Really there are stories. I think of everyday heroes and there are people that are accomplishing amazing things and doing amazing things with kids. Almost daily you can see somebody going above and beyond. I'm surrounded with very good people, so I guess I get my motivation from the people I'm around and just the things that I see happening within the organization that are exceptional.

Another participant shared,

I think one of the things that causes me to go home with a smile on my face is when I see the people I'm working with being successful and when I see other administrators, teachers, kids, that have shown success, that they've grown or that they are doing things better than they used to do. They have somehow learned some new skills and they're more effective. That really makes the daily grind of things that come along so much better when you see that growth in your

organization. And I think a really important part of the superintendency is to make sure that the people that are working under you are constantly learning and growing.

Many participants expanded upon the reward of seeing students academically successful. Following are comments they made:

Seeing kids successful (is rewarding). Seeing something happen. Recently I was contacted by a graduate who was so excited about discovering that a paper she'd written as a junior in high school was now being used by the state of Nebraska as a model paper for exemplary writing.

Another participant said, "What your students are achieving (is a reward). I'm kind of distant from interactions with students but being able to watch our students perform and be successful through the year, you know, I enjoy that aspect of it."

Looking at terms of accomplishment, you're probably going to be able to realize it when you look back on a year and have a better sense of accomplishment and some of the goals that maybe were set and achieved and so forth.

I think it (accomplishment) has to be measured student-by-student, school-by-school. The successes and rewards in schools on a daily basis, a monthly basis, or annual basis would be the success and rewards at the superintendent level as well.

Another participant noted yearly rewards,

I think the yearly rewards are just looking back and whether it's student achievements, student behavior, student attendance, graduation rates, etc., looking back in review at what we accomplished.

Participants identified administrative retreats,

We have an annual report that we do. We also do an administrative retreat where we not only look back at what we've accomplished in a year but look forward to what we want to accomplish the next year. That is kind of a celebration but a renewal when you look at wow, we've come this far.

Every year we conduct a retreat. We take a dipstick measure of the organization. We look at student achievement. We look at facilities. We look at just about every aspect of the organization and we either see growth or we see maintenance or you know, just whatever we see. I think sometimes that's probably a reward and a challenge at the same time.

Several participants indicated that making forward progress regardless of obstacles or conflict was a reward in the superintendency that gives them a sense of accomplishment. Following are comments they made:

I think when you are spending your time working on what I call the right things. There's a lot of minutia in the job. There's a lot of paperwork in the job. People do crazy things sometimes. When you get to work on the right things. Your planning what the school's going to look like in three to five years, you're talking about data, and what you're going to do differently. I have a big love for

curriculum and instruction so when I get to spend time talking about instructional practices that's a good day.

The biggest thing in a good day is seeing the light bulb go on in a student or teacher, or even a parent. Also, having an educational conversation. All too often in education we get tied up with the extracurricular activities. You know, "your kids playing over my kid." Some of those minute things that really don't have any or at least shouldn't have any affect on things. A good day is where we can have discussion on what is the curriculum we're working on and how can we improve it. How can we teach kids these certain skills that are going to have lasting impact?

A few participants commented on feeling a sense of accomplishment and reward through the absence of conflict or through resolving conflict. Following are comments they made:

A good day for me is when you're confronted with some conflicts that have to be resolved. I like to feel that I've accomplished something in the day. A lot of conflicts and issues come across my desk. I look at it as a great opportunity for us to come to a common understanding of what is needed. And if we come to a common understanding it's going to prevent further conflict and controversy and it will help us be closer to getting towards the mission. A good day is when you had a controversial issue, something that can be resolved. I find real satisfaction in the opportunity to solve a problem.

Another participant described a good day as follows:

No parents are calling angry. No staff members are in here crying or angry.

Nobody's mad at the custodians or mad at the cooks or those kind of things.

Another participant agreed that a good day involves "minimum negative phone calls."

One participant said,

I don't want to overemphasize conflict, but it's nice to have a day when you don't deal with a conflict and your focusing on building instead of repairing some damage that was along the way.

Another participant added, "I think good days are when you know you've got things done."

One participant stated the importance of completing his agenda,

I'm a list guy so I really believe in having an agenda. If I have that agenda in front of me, and I can accomplish a good chunk of that agenda then I think that's a good day. If I put enough good days together then I'm going to have a good week and a good year.

Another superintendent commented on having a list,

From a really personal, selfish vantage point, a good day as a superintendent is a day where when I have my list of here's my objectives for the day and I'm able to accomplish several of those. Any time I am able to do that it's rewarding.

One superintendent said,

If you actually get something done instead of just acknowledging that we have more to do. I think that if you have a meeting that you plan that goes effectively and efficiently and works towards some outcome that's a good thing. There are sometimes that I look at the clock and I'm very amazed at how late it is and it's not because there was a crisis but just because you are busy doing things all the time.

Another participant added, a good day is when you can "Go home and can sleep at night."

One superintendent reflected on "the little things" in the position,

I think it's the little things. Getting test scores back and seeing how we've done well. It's seeing the various activity groups do well. We've started a new reading program two years ago and seeing how that goes. It's just those little successes that students have.

Another superintendent described a good moment the following way:

It's kids' performance. It's student performance...It's the kid making the catch on Friday night at a football game and it's the student in a role in a performance on the stage and it's the student that knocks off a terrific ACT that our school district gets credit for. It's all of those things.

One superintendent described the reward of reflecting on successes,

You can look back and see a job well done. It doesn't have to be something I'm responsible for necessarily but to see students succeed, to see faculty succeed or staff members experience success. It can be community related too.



Another superintendent added,

Probably the basics. It goes back to seeing success in students. You know, seeing that light go on and not only for students but for staff. We do a lot of things collaboratively here. So having conversations of what's best for kids and seeing it come to fruition is probably the biggest "aha" moment.

### **Interactions with Others**

Several participants identified interactions with others as a reward to the superintendency. Many participants specifically mentioned the reward of getting into school buildings and interaction with students and teachers. Following are comments they made:

I just love walking down the hall. You know, when I get stressed, I just go out in the hallway and see kids between classes and ask how things are going and just say hi to people. (I) go down in the lunch room, see the kids in there visiting or go over to the elementary classrooms, or go over to the primary building and watch recess, you know, it all comes back to reality, what we're here for and what school's all about.

We have an early education program with children with disabilities. They asked me if I would come over to one of the centers and teach a music lesson for fifteen minutes. Now, I have no idea what I'm going to do, but I'm looking forward to it because I'll get to be with some kids. Now there's a reward you don't get to do everyday. And so, that's one of the things that stands out the most.

Well my best moments are probably with kids. I've had a large family myself which is part of why I am so kid oriented. But, walking into classrooms and seeing affective practices going on and going to honors night at the end of the year and watching those kids that you have that come from other countries and they're refugees or they're immigrants from Central or South America and the pride that you see in their parents and in them knowing that their next stop is college...that is incomparable to anything that I think you can see.

I think the conversations with young people (are rewarding). I have always made it a point that Tuesdays through Friday I eat lunch with young people to keep grounded in terms of issues. And again, knowing that after listening and studying that you can somehow shape and respond to the needs of young people. So the rewards would be the feedback, and the opportunity to ensure equitable opportunity for young people and it's the reward that comes with steps taken in that direction on a daily basis.

One of the neatest rewards, and it doesn't happen on a daily basis, but it's when you get out and you're around kids. And, you get to do something with kids. Because when you're at the district office, unless you happen to be in a school where the district office is out in the building, and you're around kids every day, it could become easy to forget what I'm doing is about kids. And, everything I do is about kids even though I don't see the kids.

I think that's (watching great teachers) is the most rewarding. It reminds you of why you do this. Watching great teachers work with children; that's the daily

reward I get. I do it for two reasons. I do it because I want to know what is going on, and I also need that personally.

Just coming to work is probably the most satisfying. But to even drill down further, the most satisfying part of the work day would be if I can go out to a school. You asked where the spiritual place for me is; it's to go sit in the lobby of an elementary school before it starts and just watch the kids and parents come in and go.

Another superintendent shared that he finds it rewarding to get into buildings. He said, "But the day-to-day pieces are getting in, whenever I can, to the buildings and see kids and interact with them."

Another superintendent reflected on his interactions with elementary kids, My office is in the elementary, which I'd never worked with elementary kids before. So, I get to go stand out in the hallways and get hugs from kindergartners and then get to go up to the middle school and see those kids.

One participant identified the freedom he has in his schedule, I don't know if it's a daily reward, but one of the nicest things in the superintendency is having a little bit of freedom to come and go as you please so to speak. I can, at any given time, for the most part, walk into a classroom. We have five different buildings in our district, and I can go into those buildings and watch elementary kids. I can go into high school buildings. Just having the freedom to come and go and I guess look at some good teaching and visit with

kids in the hallways (is a reward). I go out during the lunchtime; the kids are outside playing. It's just being around the kids a little bit. That's nice.

One participant said,

The daily rewards are we are here for one purpose and that's to meet the unique needs of all of our learners. So my daily rewards, because I'm not in a school, is sitting in a school, which I love. I just love to be in a school any time I can.

Participants commented on having positive interactions,

What I enjoy I guess are mainly just the people and interactions. I don't get to interact with students as much as I would like to, but I still have considerable interaction with teachers, staff members, and we have weekly administrator meetings. I'm involved extensively in the community through various organizations and service groups. I interact at all levels and I really enjoy that interaction.

I think you get to work with a wide-variety of people. I enjoy that. You're working with administrators, you're working with community groups, and you're working with board members. I like that part of it. I find that rewarding and that happens on a weekly basis.

The weekly things I see are deeply rewarding in my position. It's a weekly commitment to get out into classrooms and actually to observe instruction and see kids engaged in the act of learning, and that's really rewarding. It's really inspiring. It brings you back to a fundamentally important reminder about what it is we're all about, and I love that aspect of it.

Another participant noted the reward of seeing quality instruction in the classroom,

I think I can see at a weekly level, changes in place in classrooms and with principal leadership that align with the direction I'm trying to go in terms of my vision. So, on a weekly basis I'm in a position to be observing and I try to get out in the schools enough to see my principals in action and teachers in action and to see if those changes we've kind of engendered are beginning to become commonplace.

Another superintendent said,

It's often the little things. When I'm out in buildings, especially elementary buildings and you see some of the young kids and you see how much they've grown. That really kind of reminds me that it's worthwhile.

One superintendent stated,

The best is anything related to kids. Whether it's activities, whether it's kids reading in the classroom or reading to kids, it's student successes. I mean that is the best. Whether it's an activities program or academic program, whatever it might be, that's what it's all about.

A couple of participants commented on the intrinsic reward of their interactions with staff. Following are comments they made:

It's talking with teachers. It's talking with principals. It's seeing them making informed decisions. And then, those opportunities that you come up with, with staff that will allow you to implement some innovative and good ideas that can

hopefully expand those doors and opportunities for kids down the road. So I try to get out to buildings as much as I possibly can. The daily feedback sometimes is kind of tough, but by trying to access those contacts with people, I think that helps reinforce that you're on the right track.

One participant discussed having positive interactions through scheduled staff development,

We've got a monthly staff development piece that we put in place. Then we've left the fourth Wednesday of the month open so that if there are things that come up for a portion of the group or the whole group we still have that set aside so we can get together. So it's an ongoing weekly type of a piece as well as a monthly component.

One superintendent noted his interactions with the community,

...I just came this morning from a meeting with the community foundation. The notion that the school is in many cases the major part of a community. The importance of our work with communities, with kids, with people, parents, students, teachers, you fill in the blank (is rewarding). The notion that this is important work and I'm having fun doing it is a daily reward.

Another participant stated,

I think the monthly rewards are getting to talk to parents. I don't talk to parents on a regular basis, so monthly I would say it branches out to numerous times during the month I have the opportunity to be around parents. Sometimes things they tell you aren't comfortable and sometimes they are not very complimentary,

but regardless, it gives me a perspective of our real customers feel about what we're doing.

One participant said,

A good day is probably when I have a balance of being in my office, getting some things done while also having some time in buildings and maybe even a community luncheon, a Rotary lunch or something that happens that day. So, I like a nice balanced day where you are in your office, you're out in buildings and you're in the community.

Several participants identified their interactions with their school board's as a reward to the superintendency. Following are comments they made:

Well I think one of the things I do at the end of each week, I do a board update, a board report. I tend to not only address some of the issues that we're looking at, some that may not be as positive as others but always to look out through the week and identify some positive things that have happened. It might be student results. It might be something that a building did. But by having that weekly, it's almost like journaling, it brings closure with a sense of accomplishment. I think if you don't have something like that in place you can often forget about all the good things that happen.

I also hear back from board members on the positive things. Part of the agenda is board feedback. So there's this time when we all get to celebrate a little bit of things that have happened. And, you know, our business, especially at this level, there's no beginning and ending. It's continual and to avoid having that sense of

being the hamster on the flywheel you need to have some points in time where you stop and look back. So those are the kind of things that really give me a sense of accomplishment. They're not big things. They're not major things, but they do mean a lot.

One participant commented on seeing growth in the school board,

Monthly I typically see the benefit or growth around my school board's decisions. A big part of the superintendency is developing your board. The fundamental job of the superintendent, I think, is to develop leadership, both the people that report to the superintendent, so the principals, teachers, and everybody else, but also in terms of people that employ the superintendent. So, board development is a big piece. You can see it in how the board behaves at board meetings. You see if there's a kind of shift in their practice. So at the very least you can see improvements monthly.

Another participant identified the reward of seeing forward progress,

I suspect some of the satisfaction I get is when I go to a board meeting and the board meeting is well prepared and the action that comes out of the board meeting is probably going to have some significance or some impact later on down the road. Seeing us continue to move forward is a monthly reward.

One superintendent reflected on being prepared for the board meeting,

Board meetings come around once a month and the preparation for the board meeting has a lot of work that goes into it, and mental preparation you go through to prepare for board meetings. Then when someone puts you on the spot at a



board meeting to speak, being mentally prepared and being able to answer those questions professionally (is rewarding)...Getting the board meeting over and saying, yeah, you were well prepared and did a good job (is rewarding).

One participant stated,

Once a month at least, sometimes twice a month, we try to recognize students in front of the board members at their meeting. The goal being to put faces of children in front of board members. That's rewarding because some of those kids have never been seen on a regular basis.

Another participant described his interaction with his school board as a "blessing,"

The most rewarding aspect of the job, and it would change if I had a lousy board, but I'm blessed and fortunate that we have a wonderful school board (is school board meetings). On a monthly basis, the school board meeting is the most rewarding thing. It's the most rewarding aspect of my job. I absolutely love the opportunity to interact with our board, to have that really good discussion about really substantive matters and for us to be able to accomplish a great deal over the course of that meeting.

Another superintendent said,

I think one of the weekly rewards is working with board members that truly care about kids. Our board sets goals every January at a retreat and the number one goal they have for them as a board is to make every decision based on what is best for kids. And you know, everybody says that, but they actually are really good at

doing that. So weekly rewards would be working with a board who really cares about kids.

One participant shared,

There are certain constants we're working on. So monthly knowing that initiatives that we have going that will help kids are moving along or they have come to conclusion. So monthly, I reflect and I visit with the board.

Many participants stated that interactions with their administrative teams and colleagues were a reward of the superintendency. Following are comments they made when asked to identify daily, weekly and/or monthly rewards of the superintendency:

Once a month I work with a superintendent's advisory council. It meets at 6:30 a.m. in the morning on Friday. That is sometimes rewarding because it's my opportunity to present a different spin on the superintendency. Instead of being somebody far off, it's somebody sitting in the same room and really trying to tell you like it is.

Another participant commented, "We have our weekly administrative team meeting and that's the point where I really get to see the impact we've had on instruction."

We've tried to design a method by which each of the central office administrators are in one of our buildings every week so we get a chance to then walk around the buildings and manage while walking around if you will. That gets us into classrooms and gets us access to principals on a one-to-one type of thing.

Another participant commented about the reward of meeting with her cabinet.

The term “cabinet” refers to her administrative team. She said, “The weekly, monthly pieces would be cabinet. Those meetings we have set up for all levels of administrators along the way.”

One participant shared his confidence and satisfaction in knowing she has a team of individuals in place that will help move the organization in the direction of the vision,

Knowing that we have a team put together that they have laser vision into meeting the unique needs of our kids, and that everything we do revolves around that. So it’s getting all of our publics together, our community, our staff, our administrators, and our kids to go in that direction.

Other participants shared the following:

I would say the ones that are satisfying are the meetings that I have with other superintendents either through our ESU meeting or our region meetings. We meet pretty much monthly. That’s a good time to just find out how other people are dealing with similar issues. We all kind of digest information that we get from the state all at one time whether it be on budgeting things or an issue with legislation or law or current issues, if you will, like bullying or some things that come our way.

As superintendent if I’m frustrated with how things are going I go out and take a look at kids or change what I’m working on. Those are good days in my mind.

Days you have some time to work but there’s a few different things going on. I

enjoy teachers or principals coming in and visiting and trying to work collaboratively.

I think the opportunity to work with an administrative team (is a reward). I've got a great central office team and a lot of good principals and so we meet weekly as a central office team. I find that very rewarding. There are lots of things that we do as a group, not just the relationship part, but just the conversations and the planning are good.

Another participant described a good day as follows:

Being able to meet with your department heads, your cabinet team and your building administrators. Getting to see kids work. Getting to see teachers work. We're blessed to have an outstanding staff and so seeing them in action. That's a good day.

### **Time of the year**

Several participants identified finding satisfaction through rewards due to the time of the school year and events associated with those specific times. Three times of the year emerged in the data. They are the following: beginning of the year, end of the year, and the summer. Following are comments they made:

#### ***Beginning of the year***

One participant stated, "Once a year we welcome people back. And since I have been here it's been all employees are invited and it's a really big deal. That's important."

Another superintendent said,

The opportunity to welcome all staff back and kids back at the start of the school year is huge. Because I think it is important as superintendent. It's your one opportunity to be able to work with all those audiences.

One superintendent said, "Any superintendent would say the start of the year, the part you set goals and the end of the year when you go to graduations."

Another superintendent shared, "Beginning the year is always rewarding in that everybody's back and ready to go and energized. You are back focusing on kids."

One participant said,

I always love to see them come and I love to see them go. But I do like fall. I really look forward to the first day, the first week of school. I don't know why. I would hope most educators are that way. First of all, I have been here all summer and it's kind of lonely. It's kind of nice to see the building fill back up again and usually the kids are really excited about coming back.

Participants described the sense of optimism that is present at the beginning of the year,

I find the most rewarding part of the year is the start of the year. I think it's so important that when people come back on those first days that we are presenting this sense of optimism, hope, direction, vision, and energy. That we've got many important things to do and we're going to get to them and the people we're working with are good and the kids and families are supporting and we have a great community. That's probably the greatest time of the year. I love that

feeling of we're going to get everybody. This ship's going to sail and it's going in the right direction.

I love the beginning of the year. I love when the kids come back and the planning that has gone on to help them is all in place and things are going well for the kids. I think probably the beginning of the year is most exciting.

I really like the fall and I think there are a lot of reasons I do. I am a football junkie so I don't want to dismiss that but it's also the start. I think of what Zig Zigler says, "When hope is born action follows." I think there is hope every fall for that group and that new year.

The most rewarding is coming back to school in the fall. You see those kids and I like to watch the elementary kids get off the bus. Those kids are so excited to get back in school. Whether you're a teacher or an administrator, seeing those kids with their new book bags and they're so excited to be there.

I guess the fall of the year. I guess it has nothing to do with school but more just that it's nice outside, like the fall that we've had this year. If you have good weather, I think the kids are a little bit better behaved and not as rambunctious and teachers and staff maybe aren't quite as rambunctious.

There is something very energizing and something very gratifying about the start of school and having staff return and in particular having classrooms fill up with students.

I enjoy when school starts. We have an activity. We call it kickoff. It's one time of the year where I'm able to get almost 2,000 teachers in one spot. I call it my

staff meeting but it's a kickoff and we bring in a motivational speaker, and have videos. It's my only time where I can talk to all of the teachers.

I think this is a hard one to say, but I settle on the start of the year because you usually have some things with staff where you're really trying to start off the year positively and everybody comes back and they're kind of re-energized and refreshed. You get your budget to bed. That's a major task accomplished in putting that in there, so I like the start.

One superintendent said, "In general, the fall (is most rewarding). The fall and spring are most rewarding. Just the whole notion of fall in Nebraska is as good as weather's going to get."

Another superintendent said, "The start of the school year is really rewarding. Just to get everything going and have the staff kind of rallied around the focus for the year and everyone having that sense of shared enthusiasm."

### ***End of the year***

Several participants identified the end of the school year as a time that brings enjoyment to the position of the superintendent.

One superintendent commented on his favorite time of the year. He said, "I like completion and closure so probably the end of May as we wrap up and see what we accomplished. And, I try to be purposeful in helping us realize what that is."

Another participant said, "I pound on my people. I tell them, if you haven't been to a graduation lately, other than your own child's graduation, you're missing the boat."

Another superintendent said,

Probably May. May brings about graduation. You start seeing students get excited not only for the end of the year, but also you know you've just gone through registration for the next year. Kids are excited to move up a grade. You see kids starting to take some of their work home to show their parents if they haven't seen it already.

One superintendent said, "It's has to be graduation. Simply because it is the culmination of what we do in the school setting. That is the thirteen years of education and that ends it."

One superintendent commented, "In spring it's good to see them go. They're ready to go do something different and you see that senior group move on."

Another participant noted, "The most gratifying is getting the job done at the end."

One superintendent reflected,

There is nothing like the moment in graduation when you see the kids walking across the stage getting their diploma. There is still that great sense of accomplishment and emotion for the kids as they recognize what they've accomplished and as they're leaving the school. That is a great moment. That's one that I don't think if you haven't been in the school business you can really appreciate how important that day is.

### ***Summer***

A limited number of participants identified summer time as bringing satisfaction to the superintendency.



One superintendent said, “Summer (is most rewarding). When the teachers and the kids are gone, and you wouldn’t want that all of the time, but when they’re gone you can just kind of get some things done. It’s just a little different pace.”

Another superintendent added,

I always find the summer is the most rewarding because it gives me enough space to review, rewind, and look ahead. For superintendents that is when you put things in place for the following school year. If you don’t have things ready to go in August they’re not going to happen.

### **Extrinsic Rewards**

Another theme that emerged from the data was that of extrinsic rewards. Three sub-themes emerged: prestige of the position, compensation, and recognition/appreciation.

#### **Prestige**

Several participants identified the sense of prestige that is associated with the position of the superintendency as being an extrinsic reward. Following are comments that they made:

There is a sense of notoriety. People know who I am. I don’t know if that is good or bad, but it’s certainly an occurrence. I can go any place and there are times that people say aren’t you the superintendent. And there are other times that I see eye contact that makes me think they’re thinking they know me somehow but they don’t know how. So that might be good.

Another participant said, “You’re the boss,” and “Everybody watches you and

listens.”

Another participant added, “It’s kind of cool when people ask you to speak for different things and you can actually influence some things that are good for your district or your community.”

One superintendent identified the respect that naturally comes with the position, I think there is a certain element of respect that comes with the position as well as expectations of the position. I think you have to be comfortable living in somewhat of a fishbowl to be a superintendent.

One participant added, “I get to be part of the community maybe in a way that I wouldn’t have otherwise. I might be invited somewhere for a project or something because of the position. I get to meet lots of really great people.”

Another participant commented on opportunities that present themselves because of the position itself. She said, “Another extrinsic reward is the credibility thing. Your position can get you into some things that you may not have. I’ve been invited to be a board member for Boy Scouts of America.”

One participant stated, “I can talk to a senator whenever I want to. I can access the governor if I had to.”

One participant said, “Your public and private life is viewed by many people. You have to enjoy the limelight.”

One superintendent joked, “I have my own office and bathroom.”

## **Compensation**

Many superintendents identified compensation as a reward to the superintendency. However, it was obvious that the topic of compensation did not put participants at ease and was usually mentioned in passing as a reality of the position. Following are comments they made:

One superintendent said, "I'm not going to say I don't value the salary and benefits package that superintendents receive. I put in a lot of hours and been compensated well and hence I appreciate it."

One participant simply stated, "Paycheck" when asked to identify extrinsic rewards to the superintendency.

One superintendent commented,

Superintendents are going to be the highest paid people in the organization. And, if you do a good job you're really recognized throughout the community and people will listen to you on certain subjects. Of course there's the other side of that too. But, generally I think you're treated with respect and properly taken care of.

Another participant said, "Yes, the salary is different than a classroom teacher" but clarified "But that's not why I'm a superintendent."

Another participant stated, "Well, I think you have to say the salary is part of it I guess."

One superintendent said, "Well obviously the compensation. With the amount of time I put in, the compensation is nice."

One superintendent said, “The compensation is very good. I think probably we complain about that, but the fact of the matter is we’re very well compensated for what we do as superintendents.”

Another superintendent agreed compensation was a reward, but clarified “Oh, it is, but probably not for me as much as some other things.”

One superintendent said, “I think they pay me a nice salary to do this work. People in the community think they pay me way too much to do this work.”

Another superintendent said, “The extrinsic rewards are in terms of finances. Obviously as the CEO of an organization you are going to have more salary.”

One participant shared,

We’re paid more. We’re paid more than teachers and that’s a big extrinsic motivator. It’s one that motivates a lot. It motivates a lot of people. I don’t know if you have read Daniel Pink’s book *Drive*. It’s great. One of the points that Pink makes is that money motivates.

### **Recognition/Appreciation**

Many participants identified being recognized and appreciated as an extrinsic reward to the superintendency. Following are comments they made:

One participant said, “Somebody coming up and patting you on the back or a board member saying hey you’re doing a great job means so much more to me than any amount of money.”

Another participant noted being recognized for others' accomplishments. She said, "Seeing other people accomplish things and then you're getting the accolades and sometimes maybe more praise and more credit than you deserve for any particular situation."

One participant said, "External rewards, I think would have more to do with the rewards you receive from compliments from parents, students, and staff."

Participants identified their individual impact on the district being recognized, The external rewards are people coming up to you and just stating their appreciation with the school district. I know they're not talking to me directly. They are talking to me as though I am the school district. Therefore I am kind of the mayor of (our district). People talk to me because I share it with all of the other employees.

The external things I think are the pride from our staff, our kids, our community, our business partners and what's being produced as a product in this district and knowing that the district has always had that sense of pride.

External (rewards) is just knowing that we're part of a system that is one our community can be very proud of. When you go around the state and say I'm from (school district) you know everybody knows (school district).

Another participants said, " Being where people in your state or in your community believe you have a good school district is very important."

Extrinsic and intrinsic rewards exist in the superintendency. Participants identified the following as intrinsic rewards: large-scale impact, influence, sense of

accomplishment and success, interactions with others, and time of the year.

Compensation, prestige, and recognition and appreciation were identified as extrinsic rewards.

## **Chapter 6**

### **FINDINGS**

#### **Supports in the Superintendency**

Another theme that was present in the data was the existence of supports to help superintendents be successful and find satisfaction in their work. Sub-themes included the following: family, work-related, school board, and faith-based.

##### **Family**

Many superintendents identified their families as a support in successfully fulfilling their position. Following are comments they made:

I would say superintendents, if married, really have to have an exceptional person as a spouse. Somebody who understands that there are going to be long hours, and understands that your time is not always necessarily your own and you're not necessarily going to be home in the evenings. You might even have to shorten vacations, gear your life around board meetings, and some of those types of things. So a spouse who understands the mission, the vision, the purpose that you have is incredible.

I don't think I would be able to do this job if I didn't have the support of my wife. Not only to do a lot of the things expected of a superintendent's wife: to show up at functions and those kinds of things and to accept the fact that her role is very public in the community is important. She's also very grounded in that she reminds me of what is important and what is not; what may really need time worrying about and things that I need to let go. So without that at home, I

wouldn't be able to do this job I do here and that's probably part of the reason I think families are so important for our kids. I know the support I get from my family and my kids.

Well, I don't know how anyone that doesn't have a great marriage can make it as a superintendent and I think some do. I don't know that I could. I mean, I have a great wife and a great family to go home to and that's my biggest support.

I have a great wife and I've had two great kids. And, you know, sometimes that's probably where most of my regret is because my wife had to live with somebody that's not home at nights and that's not been easy at times. That love and support has always been there. She's been better at it than I have.

Home is just an incredible support. That is extremely important in the superintendency to have home support. It is extremely important in the superintendency to have home support because with the schedule, you can't say you're going to be home at a certain time every day, yet you have to respect that and get home often. My spouse has just always been very supportive and we've always had a "let's do this together" attitude whatever jobs we had. I've not had a job other than this district. This is my thirty-ninth year. So from being a teacher to principal, to director of staff development or executive director of curriculum instruction and staff development to assistant superintendent for human resources, this is my family. So I have a family at home and I have people I love at work.

One participant said, "I've been married for forty plus years to the same woman and our relationship is critical to my sustaining work."



Another participant said, “Well my wife’s always been very supportive. My kids haven’t always enjoyed having a father as the school administrator.”

One participant said, “My wife, bless her, knows that a lot of what I deal with is done on a confidential basis so sometimes I just need to go home and vent and she’s learned to just sit there nod her head and listen to me vent.”

Another participant commented on her husband’s understanding of her position, He also understands what this job means in terms of how I perceive it and knows what the load feels like at times and knows what he has to do to help me especially with that. So, I don’t think you could do it without a spouse who gets it.

The home thing, I think it, for me, is vital. A vital source of support is my wife who is incredibly just loving and caring and will unconditionally (love me). That’s the great thing. Tell me that I am doing great, even if I’m not doing great.

One participant discussed strain of long days,

It can be a home that understands literally being gone eighteen hours a day six days a week goes with the territory and are willing to be incorporated into that process. One’s hobbies and one’s family’s commitments and joys are part of that responsibility as well.

Another superintendent said,

I have a wonderful husband. The company he was working for was going out of business and he wanted to start his own in a little different direction, which he

did. I went back to work full-time and so he was home with the children and was doing his thing out of our house. That's worked really well for us.

At home it's first and foremost my wife. I'd give any administrator the advice before they ever head into any level of administration to make sure that they have a very candid conversation with their spouse. I don't think it matters if you are male or female, if your spouse doesn't understand what you're going to get into, your going to head for trouble somewhere. Because when I talk about balance in my life, the hours never balance. The hours of work always are far more than the hours that I have for my personal life.

One participant said, "I have a great husband, most of the time, who understands. He understood very much when I took this job what it would entail and he's very supportive. He's probably more supportive of my late hours than I would be if it was reversed."

Another participant said, "Supports at home, wow. I've been married for thirty-seven years. We had an anniversary January 11<sup>th</sup>. The support of my wife has made an extension of my career possible."

A couple participants noted the additional support they felt from having a spouse who also worked in education:

I met my bride on a blind date when I had just graduated from high school and she was going to be a junior in high school. And so forty-one years later she's still letting me date her. She's a special education administrator in (a school district). She's had lots of practice in meeting the needs of people with

disabilities because she's married to me, but what we have is a true partnership.

She's been a person that has always been supportive. She has allowed me to see a variety of different perspectives on things. Again, it's the unconditional love but also being willing to let me know if I've gone too far in one direction or another.

Having another administrator I know I can talk to about whatever and it's not going to leave the house. I don't have to worry about it being confidential and he also understands what being an administrator's about so that's very good.

My wife's mother was a teacher and her dad was an administrator and she understands things that go with being an administrator. I think to be successful, to keep your head above water, you have to have a good support system at home.

## **Work**

Several participants stated that they had supports at work that helped them be successful and find satisfaction in their positions. Following are comments that they made:

The support at work for me is that I have a great leadership team and part of that team was selected. We philosophically are all on the same page. Very few major issues are not discussed as a team. While I may still have to make the final call, and usually do, there is a great sense of support that everybody that's sitting at the table, that I bring to talk about it, understands they have the freedom to disagree and to voice opinion. The last thing, the worse support, are the people that always agree with you. Group-think is the quickest way to defeat what you want to get accomplished.

The team of people at work are critical. We're a really flat organization so everyone just pitches in. We're large enough to have great people, to have great ideas, and we're small enough to affect change pretty rapidly. So we're coming together in many different ways.

Principals are fabulous. Principals absolutely do the work. Teachers do the work. I just kind of orchestrate, but those are the people that do the work. If they're not doing their job then my job is never going to be successful.

I think connection to your staff, connections to your central office staff and connections with your administrative and teaching staff (provide support). You get support by supporting.

A superintendent stated he feels support from other administrators when "just interacting with them."

Another superintendent expressed her confidence in her administrators,

I have a really great group of administrators; people who have been in it a long time who I don't have to (manage). I mean we talk and we touch base with some of the projects we're doing, but I don't have to micro-manage their work. I don't have to do their job and so that's huge. That's a big thing.

I have a cabinet that has been very helpful to me at times. Some cabinet members are more helpful than others. I find that the longer I have to mold those folks to work in this group the better they get.

The other real important piece at work for me is what I call the leadership council. The leadership group that I'm in charge of. When I was at (district) that was just

about three or four people. Now at (district) that's about twenty-five people. That's principals, assistant principals, various directors of transportation, food service, special education, human resources; all of those directors of particular areas. Again, their relationship is the primary piece of that.

Another superintendent said, "For me I think the biggest support is our administrative team."

Participants stressed the support they receive from different individuals,

As a superintendent a work-based place of support is an understanding you cannot do it all alone. You should not attempt to do it individually and there are people around you who are working here also as educators. It's also their jobs to help make great things happen for kids. I have to be willing to delegate.

I have a fantastic, phenomenal administrative team. You try and hold that line between being their boss and also knowing that they're your colleagues. I could trust any one of them if I needed to bounce something off of them.

It's certainly a great administrative team. It's making good decisions in hiring. It's having good supports in place for staff through mentoring and through the right people in the building administering to the right support staff all along the way.

Another participant said, "Really probably most of the reward or support comes from your colleagues. You develop your network and friendships with those key people."

One superintendent identified feeling supported by the network of superintendents in Nebraska,

I guess the nice thing about being a superintendent in Nebraska is there's a strong network of superintendents....The Nebraska Council of School Administrators has set up a very good network. After I started as a superintendent, they created a mentoring program so first year superintendents get matched with an experienced one.

Another superintendent said, "I feel supported from a professional organization. Certainly, NCSA, I feel great support from them. I feel support from the Department of Education. I feel support from fellow superintendents."

Several participants commented on the support of their staff. Following are comments they made:

Well, I have a tremendous staff. When I say staff, I work with both certificated and hourly employees who really in some way are dedicated towards making my life easier and making things happen that I hope to happen, and helping me lead the organization. I'm supported by a team of people that are just the absolutely most wonderful people you could probably ever meet in the world.

Another superintendent said, "I think your secretary better be a good one. Someone you enjoy being around."

Another superintendent identified the significance of her secretary. She said, "I also have had the good fortune of having very good secretaries."

One superintendent stated that he did not feel support at work. He said, "Not

really. It has to be an internal thing.”

### **School Board**

Many participants identified their relationship and communication with their school boards as being a support to their success and satisfaction. Following are responses that were recorded:

My school board has been very supportive. Like any elected group you have people with varying ideas and beliefs and those types of things. I think I’ve gotten a tremendous amount of support from them because I make such an effort to be very open and honest. When I took this position, I said that transparency was the most important part of this... I also get a lot of constructive feedback that makes me stop and think we do need to maybe look at this differently. But, I see that as support when I get constructive criticism.

Each year we’ll have retreats and we’ll set goals and we meet in small groups and work on those goals on a regular basis so that’s one way of support... I’ve developed relationships with some of the board members, more so than others, and I think that also it is always helpful if you can develop those relationships and have some interaction beyond just school business. That makes the job more enjoyable.

I have a lot of support systems with my school board...I’ve been blessed here the last fifteen years. I’ve had a really good school board: people who run for the purpose, the real reason you should run for a school board, and that is a sense of community spirit, community pride and that it’s your civic duty to sit on a board.

Any research that you read will show the success of a school district is directly correlated to the longevity of the superintendent and the school board working together.

We have six great school board members. We're honest with each other, even if it's painful. We focus on kids. We don't make decisions on what's best for adults, me included. And if anybody tries to do that, it just sticks out like crazy. You can't get away with it. I get calls from them asking, "How are you doing?" Are you getting away from the office enough? I have a very supportive board.

You know, that's one thing I've been blessed with here. I have a very good board - a lot of experience - a school board that knows their role is policies and procedures and they let me do my job. That's not always been the case with boards I have worked with.

I've had a good experience with our board... They have been very supportive. We pretty early on developed a pretty trusting relationship. But, it's a pretty good two way street in that I give them the information that they need to feel like they can be supportive of what I do because they know enough to know what's going on.

I think that my school board (is a support). I think the openness of our relationship is helpful. They are able to say anything, anytime to me and they feel we have what I'd call a good, by and large, kind of social relationship where we can have fun together and laugh and be human. I've worked with other boards where there's clearly personality divisions and people with agendas that don't allow them to be social with you. That's a huge reward for me.



I have a great working relationship with the school board. Even when we have conflict and we don't agree, we don't agree professionally. I think that is good. I see at times superintendents that are constantly battling with their board and you're thinking I wouldn't want to be there. I wouldn't want to be in that situation.

Another superintendent talked about having to cultivate a positive relationship with her board. She said, "It took about six months, maybe nine months to start building that trust and now we have a great working relationship. The last year and a half the school board has been extremely supportive, and I wish they could come in a little more often just to sit down, have a cup of coffee and visit."

One participant said, "I've got the best board president that you could possibly have. We share each other's thoughts. We share our feelings. We share advice to each other and it really goes both ways. I have an incredibly supportive board president."

Participants recalled having open and honest conversations with their boards, I try to work hard at spending time (with the board). I can't do individual conversations at a board meeting. You really only work for the board. I do try to meet with one or two board members between each board meeting, and we just have a conversation about what's on their mind and what they're hearing.

I can be honest with our board president, and I can say here's something I'm puzzled about. Here's something we're working through. Here's something I see coming, and she's going to be totally honest, listening, supportive, and knowledgeable in her response.

The school board I currently have is a gem of a school board. The first couple of years I was here, a school board can be altered. I would say almost ruined but that's not true. A school board can be altered by one person. I mean that school board member purposefully threw bricks on the train tracks to stop the train...If I'm spending all my time pacifying school board members, I'm not doing my real job. So, the better your school board, the better your success.

One participant shared, "I just think the nature of our school board is very supportive. I just don't have to worry that on every decision, what's the board going to think because they are a pretty solid group. That's very helpful."

### **Faith-Based Support**

Every participant identified some form of faith-based support in their life that helped them find satisfaction in their professional life. Support systems such as a strong Christian faith, church attendance, prayer, and meditation were among several faith-based supports identified. Following are comments that were made:

The faith-based component is the only part of what we've got that's infallible.

Because even the loving and caring commitment of a person, like I mentioned a loving spouse, you can't rely on. You can't rely on a person, on an individual the way you can rely on God.

In fact, my faith has been something I've relied upon all my life, and I think it's very important. I think as you deal with complex problems, as you deal with a time of very emotional issues, very tense situations, it's important to have some

kind of spiritual life and some kind of way, if you will, that spirit, whatever it is.

You really need to have a pretty good grounding in your spiritual life.

Faith-based. That is critical. Let me think how to say this. I have people at work who share the same strong Christian values that I do, but my closest friends are not at work. I have a friend that is a very close friend who is the head of a large company so we share similar responsibilities. I know that I could call or text him and talk to him.

One participant communicated that she feels she is where God wants her. She said, “God’s got reasons why we’re in different places, and I believe I’m in the position that He wants me to be in and hopefully I make a difference.”

Another participant described his role as a “calling” from God,

I see education as a calling. There’s more to becoming a complete person than just learning algebra and science and those types of things. You have to understand that you are part of something much bigger. And for me, knowing that I think God put me on this earth with certain skills and talents, and I think it’s up to me to use those in a way that benefits others. And, that’s why I think it’s so important what we do. We always go back to how is this going to affect kids and affect families because I think that’s why I’m here in this position. I don’t think it’s just by accident. It certainly wasn’t my good looks. I think we’re put in places for a reason.

Another participant expressed,

I do belong to a religion and practice it regularly. There are times I ask for help. I do use some biblical references once in awhile, and I always mention beforehand that it's a biblical reference and some people may consider the Bible a book and not fact but the one that I've used most often this year has to do with the Gospel that says where Christ says, "My father knows the sparrows; if he takes care of them, how much more will he take care of you."

Faith-based. I think that's so internal. I belong to St. Patrick's Catholic Church and that's very important part of having balance in your life. I read scripture in the morning when I get up. I never miss mass on the weekend because you have to see things from a bigger picture.

One participant not only recognized the importance of faith in his life but also in the lives of the students he works with. He said, "A faith-based community is a personal matter and at the same point, everyone understands that the three ingredients that you say to young people on a daily basis need to be in place: the education, the family and the spiritual well-being is an important part."

I think it's very personal. I never try to preach it, but I try to live it. Hopefully people can see that. Living life with integrity is important. People can see I think; they might not know what church you worship at but they know whether you're Christ-centered in how you live. I really believe that the people I work with know or at least have their own opinion of that. To give time every day to my spiritual development is more important than anything else that I do...I think you can move along and be worldly, very good at what you do and move through the profession but if you don't have that spiritual piece it's fool's gold.

Well, for me faith-based comes first. I think you have to have a spiritual commitment to this work if you're going to do it with integrity. Those that don't can go through the motions and do the work and even be good at it sometimes but if you don't have a real solid core of faith that the work you're doing is for Truth and for the least of those before you, the rest the work fizzles out pretty quickly because there's an inadequate commitment. It goes back to what I said, if you really believe all kids are precious in the eyes of God you can't do certain things or you can't surrender to certain behaviors. For me, it's a constant reminder every day that I've got a lot more work to do.

I also access that belief system on a daily basis when I start my day in scripture and prayer. I pray over this district. I walk through buildings at the beginning of the year. I have an underground group that prays for our district on a weekly basis that I can give them confidential, non-identifying kinds of needs that I know get addressed. And, my faith also comes in the form of my extended family structure, knowing that I have parents that get up every morning and pray for me. That gives you a lot of confidence as you walk into your day. I firmly believe I won't be dealt anything I can't handle because I've been equipped to do it.

One participant described his Saturday morning Methodist church club,

We call ourselves Cowboy Capitol Consulting. It's a group of guys that get together. It's a wonderful group. Our minister is there and this same group eats breakfast together every Sunday morning after church, and their support has been tremendous.

I'm actively involved in our St. John Lutheran Church here in town. I attend Bible study group and it's a men's group that meets every couple of weeks early on a Tuesday morning. That group's very supportive. We spend a lot of time, even there, talking about school issues too. That helps. Beyond that, it's just the faith, my faith that I have.

One participant discussed his desire to earn Grace even though he realizes it is a free gift from God,

Witnessing is a very important part of my life. Ultimately, faith plays a huge role. I ask forgiveness on a regular basis, and I'm searching for glory and know that I am saved by Grace, but it doesn't feel right to just be saved by Grace. I'm feeling like I need to do something to earn it. You know, like it's you're always in that conflict of, well, the Grace does it, but it just doesn't feel right not to earn it. That's a pretty important part of my life.

Let me just tell you that when I was a kid, I had a very strong faith relationship with my God and Savior. And you know, I kept that pretty much to myself but it showed in many of the things that I did. There wasn't a person who would not stop to tell me, "You're going to be a preacher aren't you."

I have a pretty strong faith. I'm LDS. I'm Mormon. I rely on that a lot. I tell everybody this, people that work on Sundays, that you're missing the basis of what you need to do. You need to take time for yourself. I'm kind of a Stephen Covey type fan that, you know, you need to sharpen that saw. And, I believe strongly in that. I don't work Sundays. I can probably count on one hand the

number of Sundays I have done anything at all and that's actually because of my faith.

One participant noted, "You know, and I guess the fourth piece, faith-based, is truly I'm a Christian. I'm a work in progress day in and day out."

Another participant noted that his pastor prays for him daily. He said, "He will stop in to see me on a regular basis and he will tell me he's praying for me. Some of the things that go on a daily grind, that is good to hear."

Another superintendent identified the comfort of feeling God's love. He said, "...to know through faith that I am loved unconditionally and accepted by God regardless of how my own small finite existence here on earth manifests itself that God doesn't care what my career trajectory is."

I have a family who is based on a solid foundation of faith. They understand why I feel called to do this. They understand that it also means that God's going to work out that piece for them as well. And so, when that's your whole framework, everything you do operates from that.

One participant said, "If you talk about it (faith) in terms of personal faith, for me it's the bedrock of everything else. My own personal faith is why I think I'm in this job to begin with because I feel like this is where God's called me to be.

One superintendent commented,

I think people better realize that for me it's incredibly humbling and it's also incredibly liberating. And that's the best thing about it. The faith-based

component of support is vital because otherwise that little egotistical voice in your head can start driving your decision-making.

Participants identified the existence of supports to help them be successful and find satisfaction in their work. Participants identified the following supports: family, work, school board and faith-based.



## **Chapter 7**

### **FINDINGS**

#### **Routines to Maintain Health**

Participants identified physical, spiritual and mental/emotional routines they implemented to maintain health. Following are comments they made:

##### **Physical**

Hunting, fishing, just getting out of the office and taking a little break once in a while I think is the greatest thing you can do. Every year when my year's over, I have vacation days left that I don't use, so I'm maybe not very good at that too. But... I do think you just need to get out of here and not think about things for a while. Like I said, I go watch kids and activities and maybe just get a chance to get out and see what they're doing—things that they enjoy doing, and I think that helps. It rejuvenates you.

You need to be active and moving. There are days that it hurts because I sat too much. And, on those days, I try to get up and walk around on purpose. So I think you have to do that. You also have to watch what you eat.

(I need to) decompress somehow. I think it's important to have hobbies. I enjoy golf immensely. I like to do a lot of things physically. I don't get to do them all the time, but I like to walk, I like to play racquetball, I like to swim - just to keep active. I think it helps us think as well. I'm not good at getting that into a routine, but I know the importance and I enjoy it, and I go in it and out of it. Staying healthy is really important.

It begins, in my case, 4:00 a.m., Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. I've never gotten a bit better at racquetball, but I consistently have shown up for thirty years with the same group of individuals a couple days a week, and we rationalize eating cinnamon rolls and drinking coffee as a result. I think it's an important aspect in terms of a balanced life, and that's truly a key. One's health and well-being is as important as any other dimension, and you have to make time for it. And so it is an integral part in what I do.

One participant commented, "You know, my wife and I walk and exercise some, but that's probably not my strength, I have to admit."

Well, my wife and I make a point three or four times a week, that we go out and we exercise. We go on long walks together, which is both good from a relationship issue and also a health issue. I used to run, and used to do a lot of those things, but at this point in my life ...we're planning this trip; we're going to walk across England next year so we're kind of in training for that. But, the physical part of it is really important, because this job physically can wear on you. Diet is important. I've eliminated caffeine from my diet because it was not allowing me to get the kind of sleep I needed at night. When you're here on this job, you have to be on your toes and giving it the best you have. And you can't do that if you're physically out of shape. And, if your diet prevents you from being at the top of your game, you really have to address those things.

I wake up in the morning between 5:15 and 5:30 (a.m.) and I go out and walk. And that's what I do. I try to get in 10,000 steps a day, and I decided I would never ever wear a pedometer, and then I found out they have them electronically,

so I can calculate every day how many steps I take. I just stick it in my pocket, and I have to get 10,000 every day. And if I don't do that, I don't go to bed.

I try and exercise three mornings a week. (I) get up before work, but I'm usually here by 6:15 or 6:30 in the morning, so that means I get up pretty early to go and exercise, so it's kind of hard to get out of bed some mornings.

I would say walking helps me mentally as much as it does physically. Journaling definitely helps me mentally. And, I wouldn't de-emphasize the part of my day that I spend in self-thought or meditation working on the spiritual side of what I do. Those are critical pieces.

We've got a treadmill, and I try to get on the treadmill every day. But I'm probably averaging three days a week. If we don't do that, my wife and I walk on the days we don't get on the treadmill.

Well I do regularly visit a doctor. Doctors of course prescribe many different medications to control certain things. I genetically have a problem with cholesterol, so I have to take a medication. But I have been pretty disciplined particularly since becoming a superintendent of getting up every morning about 5:00 (a.m.), heading to the gym, and spending about an hour each day, warming up, doing fairly vigorous exercise for thirty, thirty-five minutes, cools down, and then going home and getting ready for work, and getting to (school) about 7:30 every morning.

I'm a person who worries about many things, and cares so much that I can really lose sleep, which then becomes this vicious cycle. But by getting a daily routine

of physical fitness, I find myself not laying awake quite as long and having an easier time going to sleep.

I don't do very well with exercise. I go in spurts. Every once in a while I think ok, you better go exercise. But I don't do as well as I need to. I mean there are times that I'll go for like two or three weeks, and I'll make myself walk a mile or two a day. And I know I feel better on those days, and I know I respond better on those days. It's just when to find that time.

Physically I have done off and on because it's very difficult to establish a routine of exercise when your schedule is so unusual. Like starting at 7:00 this morning, and I'll end at 10:00 tonight.

Well, I have some at work. I've lost thirty pounds actually in about the last six months. I'm trying to exercise once a day, sometimes twice a day, which I think is huge. I think exercising is a huge part of your life. I'm actually doing the P90X workout.

Three times a week I do thirty minutes of aerobics, and about fifteen to twenty minutes of weights. I've had hip replacement and ankle surgery from old basketball injuries and so I have to be careful. I also have to watch what I eat.

You have to stay away from a lot of comfort food because it's not good for you. I don't drink a lot of caffeine. I just, you have to watch lots of things.

Well I spend about six or seven hours a week working out. I'm an old, well I should not say old, I'm an experienced, former, health and physical education

coach. I spent a lot of time in that, so that's my area. I take several classes at the Y.

I used to joke when I first started teaching. I was 6'2" and 180. And that's probably the one aspect that I've not balanced well at all. I just hired a high school principal here, he started when I did and we had that conversation that before we got into administration working out or running or jogging or whatever riding bikes was part of our daily routine. If it's a day where we're checking roads I'm up and out the door by 4:30 in the morning, and, if you have a basketball game, you're probably not home until 10:00. Then balancing that family life, and so it's one of those deals that we discuss in our administration meeting in fact, that we've got to take care of our physical bodies as well. And, concession stands are a bad, bad thing.

I will tell you that it is a very difficult thing with this job, because you do so many evening things. I ran a 10K September of my first year, and after that it was pretty tough to maintain that level of physical peakness. I'm not at the level that I was when I took this job, and the difference probably is getting home at 5:00, and running two miles as opposed to forcing yourself to get on your treadmill at 9:00, and doing two miles of walking.

But physically I have not found time. I still have not found a good time, except for spring through fall when I get to mow my lawn three times a week, and almost three times a day, my neighbors would tell me. But, that becomes my think time. Got my headset on; I can do some exercise with it. So yard work is there. But I would say to people, find a way to do a better job of taking care of yourself

physically. I've had so many colleagues over the years that have gotten right to that edge of retirement, or just shortly into retirement, and by that time, health has broken down completely. You're not around very long to enjoy it. So I would say do a better job than what I've done to find time.

I run at least forty miles a week, or, around forty miles a week. And, I'm a marathoner, and so like at the end of this month, I'll go down to Houston to run in the Houston Marathon. I just find that that's very rewarding. When I routinely exercise, I sleep better, I'm more mindful of my intake you know, in terms of diet, and so I think those are really important routines to have in place. And I think people derive fulfillment in different ways from physical exercise.

Physically, we still play basketball. They have a noon game here, and I try to make Mondays and Fridays in the noon game. The fitness center that you saw, I try to get two or three days a week in there on the elliptical and just doing a few free weights.

I think it's important to eat and sleep, but those two things can be really lacking. And if, you don't eat and you don't sleep, it's difficult to think on your feet. That is something I have to work at, because I don't really care if I eat. So that's where my support comes from when I get home, we eat.

One person expressed his difficulty with finding a time to exercise. He noted, "Well, I haven't done too good at that lately."

Another person said,

Probably the biggest thing is I like to work on cars...I guess for me, it's cars, for others it's a different hobby. It's just finding something to take you away from it (work). When we're headed to a basketball game or a softball game or whatever the activity may be, my wife says, "clear your head." That helps, but it's also important to find something so work doesn't define you as well.

I commute to work. I get in fifteen or twenty miles a day (riding bike) just getting to and from work. So I set up a routine there. I have clothes stored at work.

There's a shower I can use. So, I've created an environment where that's possible.

Another participant said, "Oh, I try to exercise when I can. Play basketball once a week with a group of guys. That's something I try never to miss."

A participant also commented, "I stay in good shape. I'm an avid cyclist. I understand the need to maintain good physical conditioning, and I try to balance."

One person said, "I play golf whenever I have a chance to."

Another person noted, "I'm quite healthy in most respects, and I eat pretty healthy. It's hard in this job to eat at the right time, and to eat the right things."

A participant also commented,

I do have a Y membership this year. I like to lift weights and swim too, but it's harder to find the time.

## Spiritual

To go to church is a good thing. To reach out to others in need. (reach out to) human needs through church as well as the community. To me there are a lot of things that I can do that promote my spiritual health, not just on Sunday to go to church.

We've got a quartet that we've done. We've done everything from weddings and funerals, to some concerts. We do a variety of country western music and a combination of gospel stuff. But probably most often what we've done is special music like offertory music, and in some cases, what we've even done is what we call the sermon in song. We kind of got going about 1980 with the minister at the church I was going to at that point in time who had also had a real love for music.

A participant said,

I do practice my religion on a weekly basis. I do not participate as much as I could or should, or perhaps someday will, because I just do not have time. I don't have too many evenings on a regular basis I could devote every Tuesday to going to a church meeting. I just can't because I have too many things that come up.

One person stated, "I reread *The Purpose Driven Life* every once in a while I guess, and I'm involved with the church and I'm on the church council, and we have a men's breakfast every other Friday and such."

I pray every day. For me, it is very uplifting to know that I don't have to carry all this stuff by myself. I think the process of prayer is important, because you actually start to identify those things that you're carrying, and then that sense of



giving those up also is uplifting. So that probably is the thing that keeps me most centered.

In January, we moved to Ralston. We're still somewhat connected to our church in Fremont. My wife teaches at Midland, and that's the church for the college. We haven't found a new church home here yet. So we're kind of in between.

I have a daily devotional that's a John Maxwell based devotional, so it incorporates leadership principles with biblical principles. I also have a couple of emails that come to me automatically that are along the same lines. I try to focus on things that will build me up.

My wife and I've talked about joining a Bible school or a Bible study and we keep saying that we're going to do this, we're going to do that, and then it's finding the time to. It shouldn't be the issue of finding the time; it's working the time into the schedule. It can be difficult.

They wanted a change of pace, and so we put together a twenty minute about seven or eight songs with a little bit of liturgy or a thought for the day in between something that led into that song. It's pretty traditional gospel stuff, new stuff. By that point in time a group called the Statler Brothers had released an album called the *Holy Bible Album*, and we took some music off of that and built that in. Then we took that on the road and so lots of times during the summer when ministers needed it people would know about us and we'd go in and we would do the sermon and song for them.

I'm a reader. I keep my mind focused on what matters. I'm a fairly active member of my church (but) less than I used to be. I used to take on leadership roles in my church and I don't need to look at another budget in trouble.

I was the first-born Catholic son of Polish immigrants, and so my destiny was to be a priest. My experience was in a Capuchin monastery after 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and so the realities came in just the life experience. I lasted forty-eight months by the way and said that it was not for me. But the experience was all about the grounding and an understanding of one's self: the physical, the mental, and the emotional and spiritual. And again, those have served as compasses on an individual and a professional basis for life. They're not taken for granted.

You can resort to the Bible once in a while, and I don't want to have some people think that it's kind of hokey. You pick up the Bible and read a few things in there and I guess you get a couple really close friends that you can talk to also.

I find myself a lot now getting upset with people. I try and remind myself what Jesus or God would do in this situation and that's not to hold grudges and to be mad at people. After that, I sit back and think about it awhile, then I think that it helps me to relax and put things to rest.

Probably the thing that I've learned most out of that is that it's helped me with my faith. We read throughout the Bible of those heroes: of Abraham, of Moses, of Isaac, of John the Baptist, and the disciples. As a kid, I grew up thinking these are super people and they were, but what made them different than a lot of people was the fact that they're the same as you and I are. They're men or women who were going about their daily business, just they were smart enough when the call

came to answer the call. And, I think that it doesn't take a super person, a super human to be willing to listen to the call of God and Jesus Christ. So that's a little bit of a different thing that's really kept my sanity over the years and it really is a nice outlet for us to be able to share the Gospel.

I attempt to read the Bible. I attempt to pray fairly regularly. I'm not sure I'm choosing, but there are days when it might not be as easy. I'm pretty regular in my attendance of church.

Reading spiritual literature is another really important thing to me because it helps my mindset stay positive spiritually, and where I need to be rather than lose focus and become enamored of petty concerns. If I'm reading good spiritual literature, there's a timelessness to it that's great.

Another participant commented, "I go to church every Sunday. We say pray over all of our meals, I read scriptures on a daily basis and try to pray on a daily basis."

A participant responded,

We're probably going to join Bethlehem Lutheran here, which is an ELCA Lutheran church in town. And I think we're going to join - have a dual membership. We just built a new sanctuary at Shepherd of the Hills, and they're really struggling a little bit with finances and we want to maintain a connection to them so we'll probably worship there once a week or once a month and then the rest of the time here.

One person said, "I go to church every Sunday. I have not missed a day in church in thirty years."

Another person said,

That daily devotion time, I try and start the day and end the day with that. And when I start the day, it's usually with those devotionals. When I end the day with it, it's probably right out of my Bible or just being quiet and still.

A participant said, "I pray on a regular basis. It's hard to find think-time in the job or meditation time or any of that. So I would say that's probably my weakest area."

One participant said,

The two components I would mention are going to church and giving yourself over to that experience, and being a member of a church. That's really an important facet of my spiritual health.

Another participant said, "Community service to me, becomes spiritual. So bringing dinner to the Ronald McDonald House and talking to those folks and that's a very good thing. To me, my faith is helping me do that."

### **Mental/Emotional**

One person said, "I have a great relationship with my wife. We try and go out on a date weekly."

Every once in a while I get a pep-talk (from a) few very important individuals in my school district. There was a time this year that I was really down and somebody said I can't believe I'm giving you the pep-talk. But there are people here that recognize that. I think you need to go away, you need to get out of your office and go to conferences or to hear other people speak, not only to get new

ideas and to be reinvigorated, but to get a sense that sometimes what you're doing is good, and it's not happening automatically everywhere.

I enjoy playing with my children and we get on Wii a few nights a week and have family battles on Mario Carts or Mario Bros or something like that. We have some board games that we play regularly and just relaxing with my family that way and playing games with them is probably my mental relaxation pattern.

I listen to music. I'm a big reader. I spend time with my grandkids. I think that's an emotional one, you know, family support. My son has moved where he's a little bit closer than he used to be so we see him a little more frequently. He's in Sioux Falls and so grandkids are probably the best thing that's happened to me ever.

A participant said, "Mental health is a couple of things. It's your family and having time with them, having downtime, friends, and faith. Those are the things that I think help me balance."

It's really important to have relationships and to keep those active. I think that it is a difficulty because it is a very unusual position. Even though you're with lots of folks it can be very isolating. The rest of the team isn't experiencing everything you are and that's what I mean by isolating. I don't keep anything from them or anything, but it's really important to visit with friends and family and do something silly and do what helps one enjoy life. Work happens to be something that helps me enjoy life. I enjoy work very much.

I get enough at work so I've just become a pretty much a parishioner and that's been nice. I'm pretty faithful about that. I come from a big extended family, so I stay in touch with my family, and that helps me keep my perspective too. I can always call a brother or sister, or my mom, and get straightened out pretty quickly.

I'm a fairly avid reader and I also enjoy movies and those types of things, but what I try to do is things that take me out of the realm of my work. I can take some mental vacations from where I am. I enjoy science fiction and some of those things because it's a world that is completely different from mine. And so that kind of change gives me a mental vacation because I can really obsess for long times about work things. And so I need some way to turn off that page. I think probably the other thing for me is that I'm generally optimistic about things. I was last born. My two older sisters were fourteen and fifteen years older than I was. I always had someone taking care of me, and I grew up with this feeling that things are always going to work out.

Let's start at the beginning of the day, that's mental. To come in here, and to take the first ten minutes for myself, read the newspaper, whatever. In the evening there's no routine. The only part of my day where I can feel like I'm in complete control is that beginning in the morning.

Almost every day I do something that I find fun. It might be the bike ride, it might be having to go to the hardware store and buy some new toy for the yard or something, but every day I do something that I find enjoyable. I think you're always trying to connect yourself to something outside of your work. It gives you

an emotional break from what you're working with, and you see things differently. I love talking to people. Some of the clerks in stores and some things start complaining about various things, and I think that's the most important thing on your plate, and it has nothing to do with what's on my plate. So it gives me a different perspective.

The other thing that I started doing, and as an old math teacher, this is not something that came natural to me, but I journal and I journal a lot. I have been putting together a lot of thoughts that have really helped me through and that will help me remember things. I think on the mental side of what I do it really helps me think through a lot of issues.

Instead of watching TV or catching up on laundry or something like that I come home and I turn everything off and I just have quiet and that has become a discipline because you're so prone to want to turn on the radio or the TV or read. Just being still and quiet, whether you're praying or just thinking but getting quiet.

I enjoy reading and I try to spend some times engaged in reading - things to relax me. Not necessarily professional reading, but things that are of interest and take my mind away from the school for awhile. I enjoy sports and I don't miss a Husker football game.

Getting away from here with a change of scenery is really helpful, but even if it's just a quick trip to Kansas City or a drive to Dallas or somewhere that's doable that just visually changes your picture for awhile and gets you away from it is good.

For me, running is very rewarding, because it's a time of solitude and it's a time for me (to be alone). I don't listen to an iPod or anything when I run; I just run, and it gives me a chance to mentally reflect on what's happened, and prepare for what's coming. And so that's also an important thing as far as mental health.

I find that I like to hunt deer. I bow hunt and so in the fall I'll maybe get out of the office an hour early in the evening and go hunt and sit in my tree and just sit out there and relax in the quiet and do that a lot on the weekends. And the same way in the summer; I try to get away and go fishing and so that helps. And, I do like to go to school activities too. I think that helps. Whenever you can see the kids doing something, I think it helps you to realize why you're in this business and who you're here for.

Actually, I think the exercise for me is the biggest mental and emotional piece I have. I try and get ample sleep. I shoot for seven hours, but if I can get six, I'm alright, which is maybe not ample sleep, but that's what I shoot for.

Another participant said, "I make sure I take time for myself. I don't let the job consume me. I wasn't always that way, but I've learned to do that over time."

I think it's being able to share with people. One thing I've found over the years routine-wise, and maybe it's routine, maybe it's mental, maybe it just keeps me out of trouble is that if I've got something that really is bugging me, maybe it's an email, maybe it's a situation with the press, or something that is going on with a patron or a teacher, or something like that, I might fire off a response. But I don't fire it off to the individual; I'll send it to a couple of colleagues. I'll say this is what I want to say, and sometimes they'll have me edit quite a bit. Sometimes



they'll have me edit just a little, and sometimes they'll say to me this is kind of a skinny rabbit, don't let it bug you; just move on. I say, okay, but I had a chance to vent.

Emotional routines: that would be sending a text off to the kids, or giving the kids a call. We just got back from Iowa City. My son now is in Iowa coaching. And so we got to go out there this last weekend.

I know that when we're focused on things, you have to be intense. You have to make sure you've got distractions out of the way. But then, you have to also leave a little time for yourself to kind of unwind and just kind of soak things in a little bit. So, I try to do that.

Family is important to me to make those connections. That's been good for my mental health. So I golf. I read. I've gotten an energetic Jack Russell dog and they're all good for your mental health.

Whenever I think of emotion, I always think of music, and of course, music is one of my passions. I've gotten away from my regular routines of music. For ten years, I've been singing barbershop with the Harmonizers in Beatrice. I got started at Shepherd of the Hills.

One person also commented, "Oh, I read all the time."

Another person stated, "Another thing is to read diversely, to read a lot of different things, and just avail myself in information that's out there."

A participant said, "Shopping is always great. I won't lie to you. If I need to refuel, I can do that at T.J. Max or Younkers."

One participant said,

I find quiet time. I find recreational time for reading. My wife and I golf together, and we try to get out occasionally. During the summer, we can find a golf league that we can play in as far as that escape piece.

It's important to read a wide range of literature. The emotional health routines, I think are really important - going back to the home example to take time with family, and to be very resolute about doing that, and to be very committed to it. Actually, as kind of a discipline part of your calendar and your routines, to take time for family events, for the kids and time to be with my spouse.

...Well there's a lot of farm ground there, but the Nemaha River runs through it. I've got probably thirty acres of trees and creek and hills and valleys. I'll go down there with a beer and cigar, and I will spend an hour walking that creek, and it brings me a peace that is indescribable.

I create certain routines in my day where I do take a little time to read. I do make sure I eat. One of the fatal flaws in lots of leadership roles I see is people take chances physically, and they don't exercise. They don't free their mind.

### **Strategies to Re-Energize**

Responses indicated that successful superintendents were intentional about utilizing strategies to re-energize. Following are comments that they made:

Reading is good. I don't read as many books as I should, but I read a lot of articles, etcetera, and I pulled one out of a magazine last week because it had a

really good idea for fundraising to get some technology support, and that was kind of like, wow, how could we do that?

Another participant said, “Working at the house, going out and cutting wood, or building something, or repairing something at home (re-energizes me). There’s always a list of things to do like that.”

A participant said, “I’ve got some good riding buddies, and every time we think about riding, we’ll all re-energize.”

One person said, “It’s recreational reading. Re-energizing on a daily basis. There comes a point in time, maybe the day hasn’t gone all that well; it’s getting out of that place.”

I read voraciously. I read fiction, nonfiction all the time. I’ve got two or three books going all the time. I read less and less probably in the educational literature anymore, because I feel like I’ve plowed through most of it.

A participant stated, “ It’s mowing my lawn.”

One participant said, “I think music re-energizes me.”

When fatigue sets in, decision making is compromised. It is imperative that we, on a daily basis, owe it to the young people we serve to be diligent about any decision that we make, and one needs to know himself or herself well enough that when complete and utter exhaustion sets in, decision-making doesn’t get compromised. Again, kids deserve better, and so I think probably the direct answer to your question is a consciousness of it more than anything else. I am an avid reader and maybe that was a result of the schedule that one leads since it’s

too dark to shoot baskets or the knees won't hold up, and so the bottom line is that you need to find that. I think it changes along the way.

One needs to constantly be recharging in a sense of what's your daily routine: how well you take care of yourself, learning what you need to learn, how well you sleep, and just keeping those energy levels up. You will need those energy levels probably each and every day.

One participant said, "The physical fitness type things: playing basketball and doing a workout re-energizes me."

Another person said, "During the course of the regular day, the best strategy to reenergize is to get up and move."

A participant commented, "Something physical can reenergize me. Being with individuals can reenergize me. Just a phone call or seeing someone or meeting for coffee."

I'm still thinking about work and so it's trying to learn how to relax and that's not easy for me. I think I've learned a way of doing that when I'm with family, which is important. That is probably number one, I think.

I think that the constant measuring of where you're at with goals, what you've accomplished, what needs to be done yet (is re-energizing). I think for me, that it's very re-energizing. The other thing that is important, and something I started this year is teaching a class for people in the district that are looking at leadership positions.

Getting good rest is how I reenergize. It's sometimes your own worst enemy because you do something and you beat yourself up over it. I tend to do that. When I was coaching, I would do the same thing.

One participant said, "I reenergize by maintaining that physical routine."

I've been here two and a half years now, and I think I've taken maybe five or six days off from work which isn't a good practice. That's one thing that my board president and I have talked about. We signed my contract and he said, when are you going to take a vacation? I said as soon as the construction is done. What I've found now is whether it's taking two or three hours out of the day, and just getting out of the office (it helps re-energize). Probably the biggest thing that I use right now to re-energize myself is getting out to school buildings.

My job is a position where I could sit at a computer monitor and stare at spreadsheets endlessly. A way to renew and get re-energized is to just get up and go. I mean actually just getting up and walking and moving. The job should not be a sedentary job, and a related component to that of re-energizing is getting into classrooms. When you're in classrooms and seeing what is going on, it is exciting. That excitement and enthusiasm of student learning is contagious, and it reminds us of what's most important. So those are the big re-energizing strategies.

If I get discouraged, I can go to some buildings where I know some really good things are happening and just sit in the back of classrooms and be amazed at how well we're doing. I don't usually get the notes that we're doing well. I usually get the notes when we're not doing well.

If you need to re-energize, all you need to do is to get up and walk around the building. You could go and have lunch with the kids, go down to the kindergarten room and get a hug, and other things like that.

The professional development activities to re-energize you are boundless. People have all kinds of thing to share with you to illustrate that if you're standing still, you're actually dying. This is an ever evolving profession and the older I get, I don't take those opportunities for all of those professional development opportunities. I belong to a variety of professional organizations. I belong to three national organizations, and I'm president of one of them. And so I get all kinds of professional development opportunities, networking opportunities, and leadership opportunities.

You're talking about energizing yourself. I think you kind of do that with your mind. You know what the education business is like. We've learned a lot about what it means to put the science of learning into play. We should be convincing teachers to do that, but we're still in our infancy in that. We've made great gains with some people, but in systems we just haven't done that. So it really does energize me to think about what would happen if we really had a system.

It gives you a different perspective when you are a teacher - when you're responsible for actually being in front of people and preparing a lesson, and doing those things. I found that very energizing, and it kind of reminds you of why you're in the business.

It all goes back for me to it's really about taking time for yourself. I take Sunday off. That's the day that I commit to my faith, to my family, to going out and

visiting other people. Like this last Sunday, I went out with our Bishop, and we visited a widow, and we had dinner with a family that's in our church. We went and visited another family that was recently married. We try on a Sunday to go out and visit people and help out other people. I work with our church youth group, and so all of those things, I think, is what re-energizes you. You need to step away from the job to keep perspective in your life. Life is much bigger than the superintendency.

I get out of my comfort zone to re-energize. I do a fair amount of work outside of the educational domain. I work with the technology sector, and I've been a leader of this project called Project Inkwell where we did a redesign of appropriate technology for schools. We drove a lot of the design work around Netbooks, tablets, and slates. It was a group of industry folks like Intel, AMD, VIA, and Microsoft and other companies that develop devices and software to run those devices. Our goal was to accelerate the deployment of technology into the educational world. My role is really about design and engineering more than anything. So it's still related to education, but when we really got into it, when you're first designing, it helped me get completely away from the educational issues and right into the engineering of how do we make a device that's functionally robust and might work in a variety of settings. Interestingly enough, that took me into contact with the military, because they were interested in if we could really develop a backpack field computer that can take a hit, be bounced around and be deployed in the field, and I said yeah, I think we could. So that was interesting work. When I come back in to work in the educational issues it gives

me communication within a whole different world of engineering, business, and those folks, so it stretches your mind.

Another person said, “I don’t think strategies. I mean to me, that’s just mind over matter. You just need to get your head together and say it’s time to go.”

A participant said, “They pay me a lot of money; it’s time to go to work.”

One participant said, “We don’t do a good enough job of reflecting or celebrating the successes that we’ve had. So that’s one thing as an administrative team that we’ve started.”

Another participant stated,

Pep talks really help me reenergize. I’ve got a mentor of mine that I would call on an almost daily basis when I was principal, and now we talk at least once a week. I’ve got two people that I can have those conversations with to help me build myself back up. Talking to my wife helps build me back up too.

A participant stated, “It usually is an activity or just a book, or something like that; just something totally different than what I do.”

One participant said,

Well right now, we go to every Husker game. I find it hard to re-energize myself. I don’t have a lot of things that I do myself, but my wife and I do a lot together. We don’t do anything specifically, but generally it involves getting out of town. Whether that means we go to the mountains or we go to her parents or something, we just leave town and go somewhere I’m probably not going to be disrupted by work.



Another participant said, “What recharges me is my attempts at vacation.”

I have to take some time off. I try to keep Saturday and Sunday for myself and family. I don’t ever do anything on Sunday, ever. I don’t do any school reading. I don’t do any school work because you do need that day of rest. I have games and concerts and things like that on Saturday but I try to limit those.

One participant said, “Typically the summers are a good time to recharge.”

Another participant said, “Well I like playing with my kids.”

We’ll go on a cruise, and I’ve learned that it becomes a vacation because I don’t have my cell phone on. Last summer, we went on a cruise, and I found myself listening to music and thinking about things that I have to do. I’m doing it in a relaxed way at least.

My wife and I don’t see each other during the week so I can work however long I need to, which is a good thing and a bad thing. So, I’m very bad about that. We do have a cabin, a small cabin up at Lewis and Clark Lake. So I guess that would be it. When we can go there that doesn’t mean I leave all of my electronics at home, but it’s better.

This is the first job I’ve had where the superintendent’s office isn’t in a school building. Before, my office was in the school so it was very easy to walk out of the door and see the kids. Well here, I have to make a concentrated effort to get there. I guess if I was telling anyone that was just starting the profession would be to make sure you take a week off.

As a general rule, administrators are not very good about shutting off their phones and powering down. I'm terrible at that. I take my laptop home, and I work while I'm watching TV.

Family vacations have been really important to me. My son and my wife are more important to me than anybody. It means a lot to them, and they enjoy it. But, it's a higher priority on my list that we get away even though it might just be five or six days.

Superintendents implement routines to maintain health and find satisfaction in their position. Participants identified physical, spiritual and mental/emotional routines.

## Chapter 8

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to examine the common characteristics of satisfied superintendents and the components of the superintendency that provide satisfaction. The central question for this study is: What rewards do satisfied superintendents find in doing their work? The responses to four research questions and fifteen sub-questions guided the study. Responses to research question two were combined in the results section with responses from research question one as they generated overlapping and redundant data in regard to satisfaction in the superintendency. The interview protocol, which includes both research questions and sub-questions is available in Appendix A. The research questions were the following:

1. What aspects of the superintendency are satisfying?
2. How do superintendents describe “good days” in the superintendency?
3. What supports exist for individuals in the superintendency?
4. What routines do satisfied superintendents implement to maintain their health?

#### **What Aspects of the Superintendency are Satisfying and How do Superintendents Describe “Good Days” in the Superintendency?**

In defining the aspects of the superintendency that are satisfying, it became clear in my study that this research question would incorporate the answers to research question number two. As participants described “good days” in the superintendency, their responses overlapped with existing responses in regard to aspects of the

superintendency that provide satisfaction. I have reported my conclusions to research question number one and two together for this very reason. Also, as a researcher, I made a conscious decision that in order to understand satisfaction in the superintendency one must have a basic awareness of the perceived disincentives of the position. Participants identified three areas of frustration in the superintendency. They were the following: obstacles and conflicts, antagonists, and the state and federal government.

The data gathered from participants' agreed with aspects of current research in regard to disincentives to the superintendency. Sutton et. al. (2008) indicated that funding for public schools, family sacrifices, school board relations/challenges, local politics, accountability pressures, and low salary versus the level of responsibility were the strongest disincentives to the position. Also cited were labor relations, press and public relation problems, financial security issues and community relations (p. 6).

The results of this study primarily focused on satisfaction in the superintendency despite identifying disincentives. Participants reported finding both intrinsic and extrinsic satisfaction in the superintendency. Participants identified four categories of intrinsic satisfaction. They were the following: the ability to make large-scale impact, the influence of the position, self-accomplishment and successes, and interactions with others.

## **Intrinsic**

### ***Large scale impact***

Participants identified the ability to impact an entire organization as being an intrinsic reward. Many participants identified this as being able to “make a difference.” Satisfied superintendents believed they were making a large difference in the lives of others.

These findings are consistent with current research. Sutton et al. (2008) noted that impacting the success of all students rated second highest of all incentives of the superintendency. Sharp, Malone, and Walter (2001) reported 81.5% of superintendents find it rewarding that they believe they influence the success or failure of students (p.11).

### ***Influence of position***

Participants’ responses indicated that the significance of the position of the superintendent gave them the ability to greatly influence others. Influence was identified as an intrinsic reward by participants.

These findings support current research. Wertz (2002b) noted “The influence associated with being the superintendent of a school district can build one’s esteem” (p. 19-20). Both the participants’ responses and the research also identified the significance of “influence” in regard to building a team. Sutton et al. (2008) indicated that “Building a team” was one of the highest motivators to serving in the superintendency (p. 6). Harris et al. (2004) described it as being the “teacher of teachers” (p. 115).

### ***Self-accomplishment and successes***

Participants identified experiencing successes and feelings of self-accomplishment as a reward to the superintendency. Participants were animate that self-accomplishment was obtained through other's successes just as much as it was through their own accomplishments.

Findings from the study are reflected in current literature. Harris et al. (2004) states, "Superintendents agree that the job is difficult but it's also valuable, exhilarating, and challenging. It provides opportunities for professional and personal accomplishments" (p. 30).

### ***Interactions with others***

Nearly all participants identified the opportunity to interact with others and build relationships as an intrinsic reward to the superintendency. Participants found great pleasure in interacting with students, parents, staff, administrators and the school board in attempts to move towards a shared vision.

The findings from this study are also represented in the literature. However, in this study there appeared to be more significance placed on interacting with students and others than is represented in the literature. Sutton et al. (2008) reported, "working with students" as the seventh highest incentive to those considering the superintendency as a career. Harris et al. (2004) listed interacting with teachers or being a "teacher of teachers" as the ninth most significant factor for superintendents deciding to remain in the superintendency.

## **Extrinsic**

Participants responses in relation to extrinsic rewards in the superintendency were categorized within three sub-themes: prestige of the position, compensation, and recognition/appreciation. The data that emerged from the study is supported by current existing research.

### ***Prestige of the position***

Superintendents reported that the prestige of the superintendency was an extrinsic reward to the position. Several participants articulated a sense of notoriety that came with the position.

Increased prestige and status was reported as a motivating factor for remaining in the superintendency by Sharp (2004). Sutton et al. (2008) also reported “prestige” as an incentive to pursuing the superintendency.

### ***Compensation***

Compensation was identified as an extrinsic reward by several participants. I noted in the study that participants were uneasy talking about this element of their job, but nevertheless it emerged as sub-theme. Several participants discussed the increased salary and benefits package that come with the position.

Sutton et al. (2008) identified “compensation” as the third most important incentive to pursuing the superintendency. Sharp, Malone, & Walter (2007) also identified “financial security” as a motivator to be in the superintendency (p. 12). Additionally, Hayes (2001) and Harris et al. (2004) reported the importance of compensation.

### ***Recognition/Appreciation***

Several participants reported the recognition and appreciation they receive as superintendents as an extrinsic reward. It appeared that in many cases the extrinsic reward of recognition and appreciation was directly connected to the intrinsic reward of self-accomplishment.

“Support and encouragement from others” was also identified in the literature review by Harris et al. (2004) as a motivating factor for superintendents deciding to remain in the superintendency.

In summary, despite the presence of disincentives to the superintendency, participants’ responses indicated that they find satisfaction in the position. Their responses displayed that there are both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. Current research supports these findings such as Sharp, Malone, and Walter (2001).

### **What Supports Exist for Individuals in the Superintendency?**

Participants’ responses indicated that having support systems in place helped the superintendency be a rewarding position. Family supports, work supports, faith-based supports and the school board as a support were all identified as supports.

#### **Family support**

The significances of having family support in the superintendency was identified by every participant.

Sutton et al.’s (2008) and Kowalski et al.’s (2010) findings support the findings of this study in the fact that a supportive family is essential in dealing with what could be perceived as “sacrifice.”



### **Work support**

Responses from participants showed that satisfied superintendents believed they have support at work. Superintendents identified different types of supports. Several participants mentioned their administrative teams as being the main support they have. Other participants identified the state association of administrators as being a support.

These findings are in agreement with the existing body of literature although there appears to be a gap in the literature in regard to support systems for superintendents overall. Sutton et al. (2008) did report “building a team” as the fifth most significant incentive to pursuing the superintendency.

### **School board support**

Data indicated that satisfied superintendents feel supported by their board. Superintendents reported having open lines of communication with their board and feeling a sense of trust. Several participants identified a trusting relationship with their board president. Participants also felt that their board members pursued being on the board for the right reasons.

Kowalski et al. (2010) reported “Overall, 97% said that they (superintendents) maintained positive relationships with all (64%) or most (33%) board members” (p. 65).

### **Faith-based support**

All participants’ responses indicated the presence of faith-based support systems for their position. Participants identified many different support systems such as their Christian faith, church, prayer and support groups.

Current research addresses the importance of faith in leadership. Duggleby, Cooper and Penz (2009) reported the relationship between spiritual well-being, job satisfaction, and self-efficacy. Stokley (2002) defined being a spiritual leader and the sense of peace and confidence it brings.

### **What Routines do Satisfied Superintendents Implement to Maintain their Health?**

Data illustrated that satisfied superintendents implement specific routines to maintain health and increase their job satisfaction. Responses indicated that superintendents implement physical routines, mental/emotional routines, and spiritual routines to maintain health.

#### **Physical**

Participants' responses showed a commitment to physical exercise but also displayed that this is an area of struggle for many participants. All participants acknowledged that it was an important piece to being healthy but differed in their degree of commitment to exercising.

Besculides (1999) and Palmer (2008) reported on the need for superintendents to take care of their minds and bodies.

#### **Mental/Emotional**

Participants' responses showed the importance of having established mental and emotional routines. Satisfied superintendents reported specific routines that increase mental and emotional health. Responses ranged from talking with a spouse to going on an extended vacation.

Researchers such as Ginsberg (2007) have reported on the stress that can be associated with being a superintendent. Ginsberg (2007) reported, “Few, if any leaders are prepared for the emotional side of making decisions” (p. 293).

### **Spiritual**

Participants’ responses displayed a strong reliance on spiritual routines to find satisfaction in the superintendency. Participants identified spiritual routines they implement in order to maintain health and therefore find satisfaction in their position. Participants indicated that they spend time reading devotionals, praying, and attending church.

Palmer (2008) reported spiritual routines as the overall barometer of health. Duggleby et al. (2009) and Stokley (2002) also reported on the importance of spiritual routines.

## Recommendations

This study provided data to illustrate common characteristics of satisfied superintendents and the components of the superintendency that provide satisfaction. Specifically, the data gathered from 21 superintendents identified rewards satisfied superintendents find in doing their work. The study also illuminated the aspects of the superintendency that are satisfying, the support systems that satisfied superintendents have in place and the routines that satisfied superintendents implemented to maintain health. The following are recommendations for superintendents and their employers based on the themes of the data.

Recommendation 1: *Provide a structure of evaluation for superintendents to be able to gauge the level of impact they are having.*

Superintendents report satisfaction in feeling that their work makes a difference in the lives of others. The data illustrated that participants derived satisfaction from feeling like they have impacted the entire organization. All participants' responses indicated that they find value and satisfaction in impacting the educational process in some way. One participant said it best. He expressed, "Maybe that's what's so hard in the superintendency is it's hard to really ever measure did I have an impact."

Current literature supports this recommendation. Sutton et al. (2008) noted the importance that superintendency placed on impacting all students. Additionally, Sharp, Malone, and Walter (2001) reported that over 80% of superintendents find it rewarding when they believe they are impacting the success or failure of students. A structure to evaluate progress and impact allows for superintendents to feel like they are making a difference and having large-scale impact.

Recommendation 2: *Create support systems that assist superintendents in being successful in their position.*

Satisfied superintendents reported deriving satisfaction in feeling that they were supported in their position. Based on the findings from this study, superintendents are encouraged to do the following:

- \* Develop strong connections with their school board and most importantly their school board president.
- \* Commit time to their spouse and/or family on a regular basis.
- \* Establish a strong leadership team that is involved in decision-making and school governance.
- \* Actively practice their faith and become involved in a community of believers.

Recommendation 3: *Establish routines that promote a healthy lifestyle.*

This study illuminated the importance of physical, spiritual, and emotional health in the superintendency. Respondents reported being more satisfied and successful in their position when all three components of their health were in place. Based on findings from this study, it is recommended that superintendents do the following:

- \* Incorporate physical activity into their daily routine.
- \* Commit time to developing their spiritual life daily.
- \* Establish time to take “mental breaks” from work daily.
- \* Incorporate activities into their weekly schedule that re-energize them.

Recommendation 4: *Be intentional and meaningful in creating positive interactions with others.*

Satisfied superintendents reported deriving satisfaction from having interactions with others. Through their interactions, superintendents reported being encouraged by positive feedback from others. Superintendents also reported satisfaction in spending time in school buildings interacting with students. Additionally, responses indicated that satisfaction is derived in interacting with others in a way that solves problems.

Research supports that interacting with others provides opportunities to be positively encouraged. Harris et al. (2004) reported facing challenges ranks as the third highest motivator for obtaining the superintendency. Through positive interactions and solving challenging issues superintendents feel a sense of accomplishment. Superintendents describe finding resolution to difficult situations as “exhilarating” (Harris et al., 2004, p. 30).

Based on the findings of this study, superintendents are encouraged to implement the following strategies:

- \* Be intentional about getting into the school buildings and interacting with students and teachers on a daily basis.
- \* Be proactive in communicating with others to find resolution on difficult issues.
- \* Develop strong vehicles of frequent communication with your school board and administrative leadership team.

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## APPENDIX A

### Interview Protocol

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer: Zachary G. Kassebaum

Interviewee Code Number:

**Research Topic: What rewards do “satisfied” superintendents find in doing their job?**

1	<b>Research Question:</b> <b>What aspects of the superintendency are satisfying?</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What motivated you to be a superintendent?</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify the daily rewards of being a superintendent. (weekly, monthly, yearly)?</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What makes a “good moment” as a superintendent?</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify what motivates you to come to work each day.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify the internal rewards of being a superintendent.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify the external rewards of being a superintendent.</li> </ul>
2	<b>Research Question:</b> <b>How do superintendents describe “good days” in the superintendency?</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Define a “good” day as a superintendent.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explain what makes the difference between “good” days and “bad” days.</li> </ul>
3	<b>Research Question:</b> <b>What supports exist for individuals to help the superintendency to be a rewarding experience?</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What supports exist at work? Home? School board? Faith based?</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explain why you continue to be a superintendent.</li> </ul>

## Interview Protocol

4	<b>Research Question: What routines do “satisfied” superintendents implement to maintain health?</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Describe the physical routines you implement, if any, to maintain health. (mental, emotional, spiritual)?</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify strategies utilized to re-energize.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify what part of the year you find most rewarding and the reason why.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Please describe your daily routines? (weekly, monthly)?</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Which part of your routines do you find rewarding and/or satisfying?</li> </ul>

<b>C L O S I N G</b>	Describe your career path.
	Describe your educational preparation.
	Describe what has been frustrating/challenging for you in your role as an educational leader.

(Thank the individual for participating in this interview. Assure him or her of confidentiality of responses.)



## APPENDIX B

### Letter of Invitation

School official

---

Organization Name

Address Line 1

Address Line 2

Address Line 3

City, State, Zip code

Date:

Subject: Permission to conduct study.

Dear <School Official>

As a doctoral student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, I am conducting a study to identify the rewards/incentives of the superintendency. Because of your work as a school leader, you have been identified as a potential participant in this study. The information you provide concerning the rewards of your position will be a benefit to all administrators. **You are invited to participate in an interview at a time and place convenient for you.** The interview will take approximately one hour.

If you would be willing to participate in an interview please contact me at [zkasseba@gmail.com](mailto:zkasseba@gmail.com).

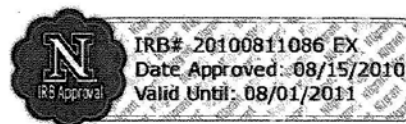
A summary of the results will be mailed to you upon completion of the study. You may contact my supervisor, Dr. Marilyn Grady, at (402) 472-0974 at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln should you have any concerns about my study.

Thank you for your consideration of this invitation.

Very sincerely,

Zachary G. Kassebaum

## APPENDIX C



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SCIENCES  
Department of Educational Administration

## INFORMED CONSENT FORM

**Title of Project:**

Satisfied Superintendents: A study of the superintendency

**Purpose of the Research:**

The purpose of this study is to identify the "rewards of the superintendency." The position of the superintendency is considered in a shortage crisis of qualified candidates due to retirement and early departure from the position. Recent studies indicate that several disincentives exist for assuming the role of superintendent. This study examines the incentives that exist in the position in contrast to the current crisis that exists. You must be 19 years of age or older to participate. You are invited to participate in this study because you have obtained the position of superintendent.

**Procedures:**

Participation in this study will require 60 minutes of your time for the interview. You will be asked to participate in an interview with the study's principal investigator, Zachary G. Kassebaum, who will audiotape with your permission. You may ask that the tape be turned off at any time during the interview. The tape will be transcribed by a professional transcriptionist and will be sent to you for review. At that time, you may clarify your responses or give the researcher other information. You may select a place with the researcher for the interview.

**Risks and/or Discomforts:**

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.

**Benefits:**

You may gain new insights to personal and professional experiences that are meaningful through participating in this study. You will also be part of a meaningful contribution to an area of educational research where a gap exists in the literature.

**Confidentiality:**

Any information obtained during this study which could identify you will be kept strictly confidential. The data will be stored in a locked cabinet in the investigator's home. The data will only be seen by the investigator during the study. The information obtained in this study will be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings but the data will be reported as aggregated data. The audiotapes will be erased after transcription verification is deemed accurate.

**Compensation:**

None

**Opportunity to Ask Questions:**

You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study. You may call the investigator at any time, office phone (402) 499-1651, or after hours (402) 499-1651. You may also call the investigator's advisor, Dr. Marilyn Grady, office phone (402) 472-0974. If you have questions concerning your rights as a research subject that have not been answered by the investigator or to report any concerns about the study, you may contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board, telephone (402) 472-6965.

**Freedom to Withdraw:**

You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with the investigators, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, or your school. Your decision will not result in any loss or benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

**Consent, Right to Receive a Copy:**

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

\_\_\_\_\_ Check if you agree to be audiotaped during the interview.

**Signature of Participant:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Research Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Name and Phone number of investigator(s):**

Zachary G. Kassebaum, Principal Investigator  
Marilyn Grady, Ph.D., Secondary Investigator

Office: (402) 499-1651  
Office (402) 472-0974

**APPENDIX D****Transcriptionist Confidentiality Agreement**

\_\_\_\_\_.

(name of transcriptionist)

hereby agree that I will maintain confidentiality of all tape-recorded interviews that I have been contracted to transcribe for the following research project: **Satisfied Superintendents: A study of the superintendency.**

This means that I will not discuss nor share any tape-recorded nor transcribed data with any individuals other than the researcher, Zachary G. Kassebaum, or his supervisor, Dr. Marilyn Grady. When the transcriptions are complete, I will return all audio-tapes to the researcher and will transfer all electronic files to the researcher. Upon confirmation of receipt of these files by the researcher, I will destroy the originals.

(Signature of transcriptionist)

(Date)

## APPENDIX E

### Coding Table

Initial Codes	Sub-themes
Encouragement from a boss Encouraged from peers Encouraged by bad mentor Encouraged by family member	Encouragement to obtain the superintendency
Desire to ... Impact all kids Impact society Impact teachers Impact administrators Impact learning Impact a community	Desire to impact all students
Opportunities that presented themselves Changing positions	Natural progression
Overcoming obstacles Using wide skill-set Resolving problems	Facing Challenges
Salary Benefits	Compensation
Notoriety Access to influential people Publicity	Prestige
Gratitude Positive feedback School publicity	Recognition and Appreciation
Communicating with board Communicating with parents Interactions with staff and students	Interactions
Impact all kids Impact society Impact teachers Impact administrators Impact learning Impact a community	Large-Scale Impact
Seeing growth in others Flexibility in position Stand up for all kids Influence board, administrators, and teachers Access to resources	Influence
Finding resolution Student successes Growth of school board Graduation Accomplish tasks School reputation	Sense of Accomplishment
Beginning of year rewards End of year rewards Summer rewards	Time of Year

Coding Table

Parent phone calls Crisis Stalled progress Slow change	Conflict/Obstacles
Unfounded and uninformed criticism Personal agendas Creating strife	Antagonist
State testing Federal Mandates Reports Data collection State Aid	State/Federal involvement
Spouse Children Parents	Family supports
Administrative team Cabinets Secretaries	Work related supports
Board communication Board trust Board President	School board as a support
Church Church groups Prayer Devotional Meditation	Faith-based support
Walk Bike Run Diet Leisure activities	Physical routines
Reading Vacations Pep talks Community service Journaling	Mental/Emotional routines
Prayer Bible study Church Ministry participation	Spiritual routines
People interaction Professional activities Family time	Re-energizing routines

Coding Table

<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>Themes</b>
Large-Scale Impact Encouragement Natural Progression Make a Difference	Motivation to obtain the superintendency
Compensation Prestige Recognition and Appreciation	Extrinsic Rewards of the superintendency
Large-Scale Impact Influence Sense of Accomplishment and Successes Interactions with others Time of the year	Intrinsic Rewards of the superintendency
Family Supports Work Supports School Board Supports Faith-Based Supports	Supports in the superintendency
Physical Routines Mental/Emotional Routines Spiritual Routines Re-energizing Routines	Routines to maintain health