**Leadership Resiliency with Rural Superintendents**

by

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Abstract

This descriptive case study examined the factors that contribute to rural superintendents' early departure into retirement and examines leadership resiliency and the challenges that the administration faces in leadership roles with rural superintendents in Alabama. Leadership resiliency skills can be categorized into the following three skills sets: thinking skills, action skills, and capacity skills. These three major skills sets are subcategorized into twelve supporting skill sets that include understanding reality, envisioning future possibilities, values, efficacy, spirituality, support base, physical well-being, emotional well-being, perseverance, adaptability, courage, and personal responsibility.  The primary participants selected for this study were thirteen superintendents located in school systems throughout southeast Alabama. The thirteen superintendents were selected from school systems that were classified as a rural school system. The thirteen superintendents of this study were allowed to share their experiences that provided insight to how leadership resiliency affects the level of success that they have experienced and reveals how resiliency affects hindering factors that could lead to an early departure from their leadership position. The researcher obtained data through written surveys, Leadership Resiliency Profile, and face-to-face interviews.

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**Chapter I: Introduction**

Educational administration and leadership grow teachers in their professional talents, which affects the quality of pedagogical practices and, ultimately benefits the students, parents, and the community. This evolvement culminates into the development of a district vision and mission that will have a positive impact on all stakeholders. The creation of the vision and mission is founded on academic goals, which, over time, advance not only the students but the entire community. "While learning is the raison d' etre of schools, educational leadership ought to be a purposeful values-driven, moral and ethical activity. Educational leaders need to be aware of their values, beliefs, and principles as well as those of their school, system, and community, and be driven to develop their schools as socially just and inclusive institutions. …Educational leaders operating in this way see their schools as holding community-service and social responsibilities, seeking to develop young people as mature individuals who are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to create a better, more just and sustainable future" (Cranston & Ehrich, 2006). The superintendent's educational leadership position transcends job descriptions and boundaries of standard operating procedures required of the profession. Superintendents must bridge gaps between diverse populations all in the name of education, but deeper and more meaningful than that task alone. In order to deliver education to a district and commit people to the school district vision and mission, the superintendent must be grounded in the vision and mission, be life-long learners, holds themselves morally accountable, and embrace highs and lows of their profession. With characteristics that embody these ideals, the superintendent becomes more than just a person with a job title, but a change agent and, a person of servitude to the betterment of young people and teachers.

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**Statement of the Problem**

Most of the leadership research that has been completed on superintendents has been in the context of urban or suburban settings. The dynamics of being the leader of a rural school district requires the superintendent to possess characteristics that are seemingly mandated from the environment and community where they work and live. Being a rural superintendent offers challenges that are in unique to the rural setting. District leadership is responsible for providing a free and appropriate education while working within the boundaries and state school mandates of communities that are low in socioeconomic classification. Leaders in rural areas have multiple job responsibilities that may generate a stressful work environment and living within the rural community places the superintendent in a school system that has to manage poverty issues in addition to other multiple responsibilities. According to a 2017 Census Report, the poverty rate for Alabama is 16.9 percent. These statistical rates could possibly reveal that poverty within the rural setting is more prevalent within the student body than their urban or suburban counterparts.

Another obstacle that rural superintendents face is having multiple responsibilities due to a lack of resources. According to Forner, Bierlein-Palmer, and Reeves (2012) the superintendents in rural school districts are responsible for the majority of the district's operational decisions. Rural superintendents can be responsible for building level administration duties, athletic responsibilities, director of curriculum, and transportation director. This makes the superintendent directly responsible for student's academic gains and achievements and leaves much of the decision making to one person. This solidification of power leaves only the superintendent to blame amid community complaints.

The rural superintendent also has challenges that are created by living in the same rural community in which they work. The by-product of being the top district educational leader is

that it places the individual in a distinguished social status within his or her rural community. This creates complexities, a lack of privacy, and the necessity to maintain relationships with the same individuals in varying contexts. "These factors combine to create a leadership work context that is difficult, especially with the current push toward higher academic standards and advanced formal learning" (Forner et al., 2012).   Other pressures that are magnified in a rural setting are the directives that are passed down through legislative demands that can present a lack of cohesion throughout the school district. "The rhetoric of self-management and devolution across some decades now has not resulted in schools and school leaders (that is, the professionals) determining and driving educational priorities. Rather, the curriculum and the accountabilities associated with the curriculum are essentially handed to school leaders by policymakers and other for auctioning" (Cranston, 2013). Essentially, the mandates that arise from the federal government typically impose undue stressors on district educational leadership, through standardized tests and student performance rated on benchmarks all in the name of academic success that is shrouded in the vail of funding.

Patterson, Goens, and Reed (2009) stated that district leaders that face adverse situations and do not flinch have the unique characteristics of personal efficacy that others do not possess. A resilient leader that possesses personal efficacy can bounce back from situations that are considered a crisis. Resilience is a requisite for superintendents in order to overcome the adversities that are destined to occur at any point in time within a school district. In order for the school administration to be successful, they will have to be able to recover from adversity and learn from the situation. "This skill set is the litmus test of a leader's ability to recover, learn from, and developmentally mature in the face of adversity. A leader can demonstrate satisfactory resilience thinking skill in the form of a realistic appraisal about what is happening now and what

is possible in the future. The leader can draw from an ample capacity of personal values, personal efficacy, personal wellbeing, and personal support" (Patterson et al., 2009, p.10).

**Purpose of the Study**

This study is based upon Patterson et al.'s leadership resiliency research (2009) that states that resilience thinking skills, capacity skills, and action skills are the three broad skill sets that are required of resilient leaders. Patterson et al. (2009) also state that leadership resilience is a long-term construct and reflects the resilience of the leaders' capabilities in the context of their leadership roles. This study presents information on the multiple roles that rural superintendents are responsible for managing stressors that can cause early departure and strategies that can be integrated into the management of a school district to lessen the burdens of stress factors.

"School superintendents today more than ever work in an increasingly high stakes environment full of adversity. Even though adversity is an inevitable part of the job, most superintendents do not have formal professional development training in the area of overcoming adversity. They have few opportunities to learn from others who have overcome adversity, applied strategies to move thorough the experience, and came out on the other side of adversity in a better place" (Reed & Patterson, 2007, p. 89). As an example, in the twentieth century, unmeasurable amounts of pressure have been placed on district leadership due to standards-based reforms in education for the academic achievement of all students. This caused a change in how school districts viewed the primary roles for superintendents. The position has transformed from implementation of district board policies to being servant leaders and providers for principals and their staff within the schools. This called for a release of power from the district leadership and increased autonomy within the school buildings. This also brought about changes in how superintendents use data and the influence that had on driving instruction. There is a recognized

need for infrastructure improvements and the need to gather resources from collaboration efforts with key stakeholders. This also instigated much needed professional development for highly qualified teachers and provided much-needed technology resources within the classroom. Incorporating these needs and developing a twenty-first-century classroom environment that is student lead and student-owned causes difficulties for leadership. In turn, these situations called for educators and stakeholders on all levels to display characteristics of resilient leaders within turbulent learning environments.

Other adversities that affected superintendent leadership were natural disasters, job attrition within the teaching staff of the district, financial woes that plague everyday operations of a school district, as well as social and political issues that can occur between school personnel, board members and community stakeholders. Rural superintendents must maintain a critical balance with all stakeholders and show perseverance amid the chaos caused by adversity. This requires a leader to possess strong leadership characteristics that require them to stay positive through adverse situations.

**Significance of the Study**

"According to the protective factor model of resilience, a protective factor interacts with a stressor to reduce the likelihood of negative outcomes such as those described previously. Researchers have identified some protective factors, including but not limited to hardiness, self-esteem, social support, optimism, and positive effect. Also, research suggests that more coping strategies are protective in that they enable an individual to cope with the stressful situation successfully and recover. For example, broad-minded coping strategies lead to greater positive effect" (Stienhardt & Dolbier, 2008, p. 445). Rural superintendents can create school districts that are conducive to positive learning environments through increased autonomy within the

schools. This type of positive environment has a lasting effect on the attitude of teachers and students and has a residual effect in the classroom. The significant amount of academic gains is the by-product of this type of learning environment. These gains create academic achievement when social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development is nurtured through the implementation of coping skills. Christman and McClellan (2008), state that resiliency is an adaptive coping trait that forms and hones positive character skills, such as patience, tolerance, responsibility, compassion, determination, and risk taking.

Most studies on district leadership have focused on urban and suburban superintendents. In contrast of direct studies of urban/suburban superintendents there is a deficient edification on superintendents of rural school districts. A thorough review of the literature suggests little attention has been focused on how rural superintendents in Alabama determine factors that influence their leadership resiliency. The purpose of this study is to explore the extent of resiliency skill sets with rural superintendents. The knowledge of this could assist in determining why superintendents decide on an early departure from their leadership position or to continue with their career.

**Theoretical Framework**

The framework utilized in this study is around the ideals that even in the toughest of times, educational leaders consistently demonstrate the ability to recover, learn from, and developmentally mature when confronted by chronic or crisis adversity. This concept is founded on three broad skills sets that are required of a resilient leader: resilience thinking skills, capacity skills, and action skills. Using the Leader Resilience Profile (LRP) to facilitate rural superintendents in determining and establishing resiliency strengths and will assist them in making a positive impact in their school districts.

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**Research Questions**

Based on the above theoretical framework and the need for this type of study, the following research questions were constructed to guide the current research:

- How do rural superintendents define their professional resiliency?

- What are the most important factors that influence a superintendent's decision to stay or leave their leadership role?

- Does resiliency hinder or facilitate their success?

**Definition of Terms**

The following definitions are implemented within this study:

- Resilience: A mode of interacting with events in the environment that are activated and nurtured in times of stress (Tait, 2008).

- Leader Resilience Profile (LRP): A survey that consists of 73 questions designed to measure leader resilience (Patterson et al., 2009).

- Rural Superintendent: "Of the 13,103 regular local school districts in the United States, 7,341 (56%) are located in one of three locales that the National Center for Education Statistics (2012) defines as rural-rural fringe, rural distant, or rural remote. Moreover, even though the occasional consortium of school districts arranges to share an executive leader, most districts in these rural locales employ an individual who serves as superintendent of schools "(Howley, Howley, Rhodes, & Yahn, 2014 p. 619).

# Chapter II: Literature Review

*"Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved."*

-Helen Keller

Being cognizant of the quote from Helen Keller, the office of superintendency encompasses the underlying message that resiliency is required in order to be successful in educational endeavors. "Society today and in the future, faces the trauma of difficult economic, social, energy, and environmental problems. These societal problems translate into major dilemmas for public education. In the decade ahead, public education will be faced with inflation, leveling out enrollments, further erosion of local control of the public school system, an older population, and a major new emphasis on technology and communication. In short, the future of public education is uncertain and unchartered" (Marks, 1981, p. 255). The only phenomenon that is certain to take place is change, and that includes educational legislation that sets the guidelines that superintendents are accountable to implement in their respective districts. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed into law in December of 2015 by President Barack Obama. The law is a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which replaced The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (Dennis, 2017). NCLB created unique problems in the profession of teaching, and actually drove some teachers out of the profession. 2017 marks the new beginning of a new administration era, that is led by President Donald Trump. This administration seems to be pushing for more privatized educational reform, as seen through the acts of the new Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos. DeVos is advocating for students to be able to choose a school setting that allows them to be successful and is conducive to successful post-secondary goals. With these dynamic changes come challenges that educational leaders must guide their school systems through while leading in a direction that is

successful and maintains positive relationships with stakeholders. Because of this, dynamic and multifaceted leadership is crucial for the office of superintendency.

There is not a large selection on research that investigates district office leadership. Due to education reform over several decades, a growing emphasis has been placed on the office of superintendent. Each decade, for the past 94 years, The American Association of School Administrators publishes a comprehensive report on the position of school superintendency. The report gives insight on superintendents and the diverse demographics of this leadership position by providing mean ages of individuals entering into the position, breaking down gender percentages of those holding the superintendent position, and evaluating various other demographic data of superintendents across the United States. It also discusses how the roles and responsibilities have extended from pressure by the government, local school boards, and stakeholders. "An analysis of historical and empirical findings on the superintendent affirms a symbolic relationship between social, economic, and political conditions; public expectations for schools; and superintendents' roles. Understanding how their roles have changed and are changing not only provide insights into the complexity of superintendents' work but also explain why some roles may increase in importance" (Bjork, Browne-Ferrigno & Kowalski, 2014, p. 460).

The role of the superintendent changes with the progression of technology and teaching practices. Being the instructional leader has morphed into becoming like a CEO or president of a company. This style of superintendent management started during the post-World War era when companies were growing in the United States, and school boards created boards of directors. The board of directors served as the governing bodies of schools, what is now known as the school board.

Superintendents have five role characterizations that help them navigate the challenges that will arise during their tenure. These roles were being an effective communicator, acting as a manager, being an instructional and political leader, and acting as a social scientist. The challenges faced by superintendents can be social, political, fiscal and legal, by district or population. For these reasons, superintendents have to be resilient in their efforts to manage their districts with a diverse skill set.

Superintendents have to be energetic, creative thinkers, and have a vision that is fueled by the demands of industry and the need for productive citizens. This will require a superintendent to take on the management role and persona of a societal architect. "The societal architect role of the superintendent, in my view, lies in his/her ability to manage and shape the environment in new directions relative to curriculum and program, to utilize varied marketing techniques, to integrate human relations skills meaningfully into schools, to seek out new and varied funding techniques, and to establish a philosophy of schools which says we are service, as well as education, oriented. It is time that school superintendents take on the role of assisting in the design of the future of our society, rather than simply 'aping' the past and present" (Marks, 2001).

The most important characterization that a superintendent can and should possess is that of personality. A superintendent with the right type of personality can be energizing and motivating, is a creative thinker that emphasizes the establishment of serving others first and looks at obstacles and challenges as necessary to endure to continue growth professionally and personally. "School districts in the United States are open systems and consequently subject to social, political, economic, and legal issues emanating from the broader society and the local community. Kowalski (2013) notes that problems faced by superintendents are related to a

complex mix of contextual, societal, and institutional variables. Differences in district contexts help explain inconsistencies across districts; however, scholars agree that superintendents are faced with pervasive social and institutional problems" (Bjork et al., 2014, pp. 456-457). There are solutions to these type of problems; it begins and ends with the leadership of the superintendent. A resilient leader finds the solution to a problem and grows instead of adopting the characterization of a victim that cannot see past their welfare. A resilient leader adopts the type of character that has high moral values, learns reflective skills that allow them to learn from experiences to better lead when they arise again, resilient leaders maintain a positive outlook when adversity rears its ugly head and causes chaotic challenges within the organization, resilient leaders also learn to establish a support team that they can depend on for guidance and direction while experiencing arduous times. "Resilient leaders act on the courage of their convictions. They realize that convictions without corresponding actions are nothing more than promises unfulfilled" (Reed & Patterson, 2007, p. 99).

For the remainder of this chapter, the literature reviewed will be most applicable to leadership resiliency of superintendents and what factors contribute to the early departure of rural superintendents, challenges of school leadership in small school districts, and characteristics of leadership needed to be a resilient superintendent of a rural school district. However, to begin, we will investigate the history of the superintendent position from when it was first created to the dynamic leadership position that it is today. The office of superintendent is a critical position in the success of a school system. The superintendent has the best chance to impact so many lives for generations that could result into good things or bad; it depends on the decisions that are made based on the leadership philosophy that he/she uses in that position. The significant point is, whatever decisions have been made, they will have a lasting effect on

student's lives. We will look at the five role conceptualizations that make up the framework for understanding the breadth complexities of superintendents and the defines the skills required (Bjork et al., 2014, p. 9).

The second section of the literature review will comprise of the factors that contribute to the early departure of rural superintendents. Tekniepe (2015) notes that, "Rural school districts play an integral role in the communities that they serve. Beyond providing students with the basic education and training that are important for securing an economic livelihood, rural school districts also provide economic support and serve as a cultural center in the community. Many researchers have suggested that the survival of rural communities depends of creating and sustaining collaborative partnerships within schools" (p.1). The rural superintendent is the face of public education in these communities, so it is imperative that he/she creates a school district that is a learning community that welcomes the public and not just a place where students are educated. Other occupational hazards of rural superintendents that we will investigate are political conflicts, school board issues and policies, contract negotiations, fiscal issues, internal/externa pressures, emotional challenges, and push/pull factors that all can affect the tenure of the superintendent.

The third section reviews the literature pertaining to challenges in rural school districts. These challenges can range from centralization of administration power, multiple job responsibilities, smaller economies which can mean less resources, community connections, and push/pull factors. "The school district is the fundamental administrative unit of schooling in the United States and the superintendent the lead official. The nature and the challenge of this position, however, vary across the landscape. Because most superintendents lead rural districts,

the challenges facing those districts are the ones that typically bedevil the Superintendency overall" (Howley et al., 2014).

The fourth section of this literature review will address the literature about the characteristics of successful superintendents that show leadership resiliency. Leadership resiliency is based on the capacity of a superintendent to lead their school systems through adversity, maintain emotional intelligence, and make the best decisions for their district.   The fifth and final section will address the leadership skill of mindfulness and how this concept relates to leadership resiliency and emotional intelligence.

**The Office of Superintendent**

**An investigation of educational leadership.** The superintendent is the chief executive officer in today's school districts. The superintendent has the responsibility and accountability to implement various school board policies that include carrying out the vision and mission of the district; adopting and implementing sound researched-based educational programs, maintain operational cost within a budget, managing staff, and maintenance and care for all facilities. The superintendent is responsible for creating and managing his/her central office staff and principals. Superintendents must work with school leaders in implementing successful academic programs in order to achieve educational goals and close achievement gaps between different socioeconomic classes of students. The superintendent is also held liable for the interactions and demands of the community stakeholders (parents, business owners, local government agencies) and the board of education members. The Superintendent must be good stewards of the district resources and guide his/her team in a direction that is conducive to the overall success of the district. The most important task of the superintendent is for the well-being of all students within the district and ensuring that a free appropriate public education is made available to all students

in the district. The office of superintendent started out in the early 1800s as a clerks' position, and the school board delegated most of the routine responsibilities of administration to the leadership of the school district. The formal position of superintendent was not created until the mid-1800s in Buffalo, New York. The second superintendent as established brief time later in Louisville, Kentucky. Also, by the mid-1800s 13 large cities had appointed superintendents of education and by the beginning of the 1900s most urban school districts had appointed superintendents to lead their school districts. "During successive eras, social, economic, political, and technological changes helped to define and redefine superintendents' work. Although they were initially regarded as teacher-scholars or instructional leaders in the 1800s, the increasing size and complexity of school districts in the 1900s demanded that superintendents serve as managers. As time progressed and at the end of the World Wars the face of education changed yet again with the creation of governing bodies of education that resembled board of directors during the boom time corporations. The superintendents took on the look and management style of CEOs and top-down management style was integrated into the school systems. After the Depression the way students were educated was influenced by the thoughts and voice of their parents. This influenced school district administration to re-think who they collaborated with and expanded their ideals of key stakeholders that included parents. Since this time the American Education System has experienced multiple reforms of education. These reforms involved increasing standardized test scores, increasing the rigor in teacher certifications, making schools accountable for student performances, increasing high school graduation rates, giving more decision-making authority back to the schools, and the third reform focused its goals on the most important part of the education puzzle, and that is the student. The fourth and current reform that we have been undergoing is that adoption of the common core standards across the United

States, which ensures a consistent curriculum that is taught throughout the schools in our Nation. This shift in education is ultimately preparing our children to be productive citizens and be able to enter the workforce upon graduating from a secondary institution.  All of these reforms in education has changed the superintendent's roles and expectations of job duties. School habilitation since the early 1980's has been at the fore front of superintendent's work Since 1990, as scholars have tried to understand the nature and direction of these changes using nationwide studies that focus on superintendents' roles. Conceptualizing their work as consisting of five roles not only is grounded in both historical and empirical evidence that reflect its evolution but also emerging responsibilities" (Bjork et al., 2014, p. 451). These five roles create the structure of the differentiated skills and knowledge needed by the superintendent and help the researcher to understand better the scope of job responsibilities that accompany the position of district leadership. The five roles in no particular order are teacher-scholar, organizational manager, democratic leader, applied social scientist, and communicator.

**Superintendent as teacher-scholar.** The superintendent assumes the role of chief executive officer in the school district. This not only entitles that person as the leader of the district, but it also accompanies the responsibility of being responsible for the education of all students within that district. "A task force composed of representatives from multiple superintendent leadership institutions declared that leadership has significant effects on student learning and successful superintendents must work to respond to opportunities and challenges of educating diverse groups of students" (Wright & Harris, 2010 pg.221-222). The Superintendent's position of leadership within a school district is located in a pivotal location that affords he/her to have direct access to key the board of education, other administrative staff (central office or building level), key stakeholders within the community, control of the direction of resources

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offered to schools, and direct connection with the vision and mission of the school district. In order to have academic success and to build a long-lasting positive legacy in education, superintendents are charged with the serious and critical responsibilities in how they lead and make decisions that have lasting effects. And educators need and hunger for the type of leadership that is authentic and based on moral values. "The relational transparency and balanced processing components of leader authenticity led themselves well to effectively include in an unbiased fashion in carrying out school procedures. School improvement practices involve many actors at several levels throughout the school district. Adherence to best practices requires that teachers, principals, and parents all play key roles in school improvement processes. They need to be inspired and coordinated, and their work products need to be communicated and supported within and throughout the school community. As stated earlier, the superintendent is the only person with the positional authority to orchestrate these activities. Therefore, the superintendent's disposition toward authenticity will facilitate the execution of school improvement practices" (Bird, Dunaway, Hancock, & Wang 2013, pp. 50-51).

Just as school improvement practices are important and key in a superintendent-teacher scholar's leadership skills, the personification of a successful school leader must include accountability. This school reform accountability is shaped by the personalization of the person in the district leadership position and by the expectations set by the demands of the school system itself as directed by state mandates. The challenges in school reform and efforts of being a superintendent teacher-scholar are placed inside parameters and guidelines of budget cuts and state mandated policies. External mandates from the state departments of education has made it conducive for district superintendents to improve best teaching practices in their school systems. Due to state budget cuts and shrinking local school district budgets the resources have not been

available to focus on those best teaching practices and resources that are conducive to successful education.

**Superintendent as a manager.** The role changes with job responsibilities for superintendents occurred during our Progression Ear in the early 1900s. This inevitable change initiative was due to the ever-increasing growth of school districts and the resources that were the byproduct of growth. Superintendents were tasked to perform several operative functions. These included but not limited to managing school districts, maintaining an organizational culture while respecting local community characteristics, fiscal management, and navigating the political climate that required a unique skill set on a national, state, and local level. To successfully manage within these environments the superintendent had to subscribe to a type of management practice that was contextual and responsive in nature. This was validated in a study of Context-Responsive Leadership, which examined superintendent leadership in varying settings of context. "At the outset, we conceptually grounded our study within the family of contingency theories of leadership. However, we have come to see the relationship between context and leadership as a reciprocal one, and believe our findings provide empirical evidence that supports our emerging theory of context-responsive leadership as practical wisdom in action, which reveals a complex mix of knowledge, skills, and disposition appropriately deployed by effective leaders as they engage in fluid conversations with dynamic situational variables. Context-responsive leadership is expressed through action, the way the leader behaves, not anyone predisposed style consisting of de-contextualized qualities or leaders in action" (Bredeson, Klar, & Johansson 2007, p. 20). Superintendents who have distinguished and appropriately acknowledge those contingencies will revel in an abundance of success. The position of district leadership is engrossed with elements of conflict that intertwine themselves in

the daily operational activities of delivering quality education to students throughout the school district. Superintendents cannot realistically manage all of these environments; thus, a change of leadership structure has to happen in order for school districts to be successful. "The emerging restructuring initiatives that call for decentralization and for increasing school-level control through school-based decision-making processes, however, suggest a primary change in the Superintendency and in the external supervision of schools" (Nir & Eyal, 2003, p. 549). The successful superintendent will manage in a way that allows schools to have more autonomy and hold local level administrators accountable for the academic goals. In the context of rural superintendents that are responsible for multiple positions due to budget constraints, actually rely heavily on local administrators to participate in management duties of their respective schools. Rural superintendents have to deal with a lot of the same aspects that plague large urban school districts but without the same level of resources available to those school districts. Rural superintendents have to manage academic goals while battling high poverty levels within the community, lower budgets that incur the same budgetary cuts as larger school districts that can better absorb that type of managerial pressure and maintain academic success. Thus, the superintendent must be resourceful and creative in how they manage school funding and how to locate additional school funding from non-traditional sources. Superintendents also have to endure and manage the changes of educational policies from the national and state governmental agencies. "A recent shift in education policy in many countries with advanced economies – towards decentralization, marketization, and performativity – have restructured school leadership and recultured the work of school leaders through various mechanisms. This shift in the focus of reform has created a relentless preoccupation with educational reform through leadership development and led to a declined official interest in school management" (Mertkan, 2013). The

superintendent that learns how to be aware of the economic and political changes, communicate effectively to key stakeholders, establish positive working relationships with board members to advance the school district financially, can be the lead educator through direction from scientific researched teaching skills can successfully manage a school district.

**Superintendent as a democratic leader.** During the early 1900s the responsibilities of our superintendents and school boards were legally bound into legislation that created a district leadership position that took on corporate characteristics grounded in scientific management principles. This type of corporate management in our school systems lasted through the late 1980s. Then came the educational reform movement that focused on cooperative assistance ideology that was the focus of students and their families. "This emphasis stressed meeting the needs of families through integrating social services with schools and school districts so that families could focus more on their child's education and less on working through bureaucratic mazes to obtain basic needs" (Alsbury & Whitaker, 2007, p. 155). This reform did place more autonomy in the schools and less with the school district but caused situations of friction when decisions were made by principals and the superintendent was a lesser part of the management equation. Accountability for student achievement became the focus during the 1990s and the success and failure of school districts has been linked to the instructional leadership capabilities of the superintendent. Improving student proficiency scores and academic growth, establishing a mission and vision, collaborating with colleagues on difficult decisions, managing reduced budgets due to cuts, and building a strong leadership team are complex responsibilities that a superintendent faces within their role.  A superintendent that describes to and practices democratic leadership must also consider equality in the school district that encompasses diversified races, religions, and genders. To successfully lead in this type of environment, that is

not the traditional school demographic that made up school districts in the past, a unique set of leadership skills are needed that addresses the needs of students, families, and key stakeholders in the 21st Century. These skills place priorities with the students and ensuring the best education is provided. Also, sharing responsibilities and leadership with building level administrators and teachers; invests in community involvement; democratic citizenship through the lens of civic curriculum that builds a better productive citizen; and embraces the instructional leadership role of being accountable for fair assessments, relevant standards, that are by products of board policies created for the success of students and schools. The democratic leader of a school system also actively participates and encourages the input of the constituents that make up the community. It is important to give key stakeholders a voice, respecting various opinions, and sharing ideals and collaborating with the community about what is best for the students is the essence of an educational democracy. While promoting and subscribing to this type of leadership and allowing more groups of constituents to have a voice will foster situations of conflict and obstacles to manage. "Value conflicts have always been present in educational administration to some extent, if only as result of the generation gap between adult faculty and youthful students. However, value conflicts now seem to have become defining characteristics of the school leadership role. The work of educational leaders has become more complex, much less predictable, less structured, and more conflict-laden" (Begley & Stekovich, 2004, p. 134). In order to lead in a dynamic era of education, superintendents have to commit themselves to become persistent in the continuation of learning new management techniques while creating school environments that are conducive to equity for all stakeholders. This creates conflict and requires a democratic leader that is well versed in conflict resolution.

**Superintendent as social scientist/architect.** Society today and in the future, faces the trauma of difficult economic, social, energy, and environmental problems. These societal problems translate into major dilemmas for public education. In the decade ahead, public education will be faced with inflation, leveling out enrollments, further erosion of local control of the public school system, an older population, and a major new emphasis on technology and communication. In short, the future of public education is uncertain and unchartered" (Marks, 2001). Superintendents are called on to become leaders that incorporate characteristics of leadership that reflect the skills of a social scientist and social architects.

The role of a social scientist encompasses several functional and dependent domains in the world today. This role increases the relevancy of history, economics, public policies, psychology, and sociology in the lives of a school superintendents. The superintendent has to integrate knowledge of all of these domains into daily leadership practices in order to navigate the district leadership position and to improve the academic performance of the school district. Over the last 30 years educational reform has intrigued a multitude of people that has affected the way teachers deliver instruction, building level administrators and central office administrators lead their school districts through collaborative planning and transforming school into a learning culture. The way society operates is a learned process through the generations of people passing their respective cultures, laws, and norms down to the younger population in their communities. The position of the school districts in each of these communities is to prepare productive and contributing members of society through the use of current curriculum and best practices of instruction; assist communities in adapting prevalent behaviors that are compliant with current social norms, economic policies, and political transformations. In order for a school system to embark on a new journey of establishing a new vision and mission, then a culture of

collaboration and trust must be established between the superintendent and key community stakeholders. Working through this diverse group of people and dealing with the issues that encompass our daily lives gives way to stages of contention that requires superintendents of education to become a social architect in order to lead their school districts. "The times now and as projected require bold, innovative, and enthusiastic problem-solvers – people of heightened awareness who understand and can control their environments and the technology which binds them. Visions will be created by a new generation of educators who embrace the idea that their role is that of societal architect" (Marks, 2001).

      **Superintendent as a communicator.** The compelling obligations of district leadership are to reinforce the relationships that exist between the school district, schools, community, and stakeholders. This is accomplished through successfully through various forms of communication. The platform for communicating does differ from rural district too much larger urban districts where the superintendent has teams of personnel dedicated to public communications of events and directions of the school district. The important point noted is that without this communication, failure of any goals of the district is imminent. "Communication skills have been recognized as essential for school superintendents from the position's inception. This acknowledgment, however, appears to have been framed by two myopic assumptions: Anyone can communicate effectively, and administrators should alter their communicative behavior as they transition from one role to another. These convictions have become much more consequential-both for local schools and reform-minded society" (Kowalski, 2005). As a result of these increased consequences for lack of leadership, local and district leadership personnel have lost their employment due to their apathetic attitudes towards the needs of the students, teachers, stakeholders, and community. Superintendents are change agents in the school district,

and change initiatives take organization, collaboration, and they also must be able to communicate adequately with all stakeholders that have a vested interest in the school district. "Planning that occurs without significant community involvement, regardless of the sincerity on the part of the school leaders, is at risk of being viewed as out of touch with the community values and community desires and therefore unworthy of the community's support. Any strategic plan that begins with the knowledge of community opinion can seek to draw together the varied stakeholders in the education process" (Winand & Edlefson, 2008, p. 37).

The educational goals of the school district require that the school district leadership communicates to all personnel that have a vested interest in the academic success of students. This academic success has a large circle of influence over the lives of several generations that can have a negative or positive impact on the local community, but it all depends on the intrinsic leadership of the superintendent, which begins with good communication.

**State of the superintendent.** The Tenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution does not regulate power over the states in the context of their education departments. The states reserve the rights to govern and enact education legislation through the state board of education which is filtered down to the local boards of education. The responsibility of local boards of education governing their respective school district is remitted to them through their state department of education. The office of superintendent has transformed through several educational reform efforts in our country. In the mid-19th century the position was considered a teacher-scholar whose primary goal was to attend to the quality of education that the students of the district received. As our country began to grow and populations boomed within our communities the superintendent took on more of a management position that developed into a chief operating officer mode that was guided by the board of education. In the 1930's after the Great Depression,

superintendents prescribed to the theory that parent involvement would help in the pursuit of quality education for their children. This led the way to some educational reforms that encompassed a focus on science and mathematics, desegregation, high stakes accountability for schools, equity, to where we are at today with higher order thinking skills, depth of knowledge, and collaboration. The role of the superintendent is entwined with the purpose and need for education. Their responsibilities and nature of the work required of a superintendent are intricately woven through local, state, and national politics. And their roles do hold a place of prominence that is connected to key stakeholders in the communities in which they serve.

The concern of tenure for superintendents is growing as the position becomes more complex and demands for performance with fewer resources are more common. For a school district that is in need for improvement academically and for a school district that wants to make a move to the next level in academic performance and increase student gains must realize the importance in preserving the superintendent of education. In a study of superintendents of education in Missouri, there was a 20% turnover rate each school year, and more profound than that statistic is that over half of those superintendents left the field of education to pursue a new career. "Superintendents face some problems, many of which are persisting and intractable. Data from the 2010 decennial study commissioned by AASA identified these issues. They are listed in rank order with those being most important at the top: (a) financing schools, (b) school board relations, (c) assessment of student learning outcomes, (d) planning and goal setting, (e) changing priorities in the curriculum, (f) management problems, and (g) accountability ad credibility. Interestingly, inadequate financial support for schools has been listed as being the most serious issue facing superintendents since the 10-year studies were instituted in 1923" (Bjork et al., 2014, p. 16).

Another key issue with the office of superintendent is the gender gap that is represented by males to females in this leadership position. With the population of the United States being slightly more than half females and a quarter of those females are identified as people of color, these administrators were primarily consigned to lead elementary schools and position of district leadership in small school systems. Over the history of education in the United States, white males have dominated the leadership position of superintendent, thus garnering a higher average salary wage that comes along with a more prestigious position with larger and more affluent school districts.

**Females in the superintendency.** "Underrepresentation of women in the superintendency is well documented. Though the number of women in the superintendency has increased in recent years, it is still astonishingly low compared to the number of women who are in academics. Since 1992, the number of women in this position has increased to 13% compared to the previous level of 6.6%. While the statistics show a positive trend, it will be approximately 2035 before we reach parity in the superintendency" (Garrett-Staib & Burkman, 2015). Also, as women garner these leadership positions, they still have to develop skills that will not only help them obtain a superintendent's position, but the skills needed to sustain their position and how to be content in their leadership role. After the position has been obtained, female superintendents have to navigate through obstacles that often their male counterparts do not contend with while holding the district leadership position. "Female superintendents are much more likely than their male counterparts to be single, widowed, divorced or to have commuter marriages. They are also more likely to be responsible for domestic chores. They also continue to face negative stereotyping as a result of entering what is still a largely male-dominated culture" (Reed & Patterson, 2007). Some of these obstacles can be self-inflicted in how female superintendents

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manage their district. Successful superintendents have the knowledge and skills to create healthy

relationships with school boards, be able to establish important connections with key

stakeholders within the community and the business community, and they have to be able to

endure tough times and abstain from actions that can damage important relationships and their

code of ethics.

Female, as well as their male counterparts in the district leadership position, would act

prudently by focusing on building their resiliency skills and refuse to develop a defeatist attitude

or victim syndrome. "Polka *et al.* (2008) described "professional victim syndrome" as a

condition faced by superintendents whose "professional and personal reputation was being

tarnished," and had to "navigat[e] the political waves in order to survive" (p.296). The authors

caution that female superintendents may be more likely to experience "professional victim

syndrome" (pp.302, 305) and suggest that personal and professional preparation is the best

guarantee that a superintendent will weather the crisis. Self-confidence, acting as if one is in

control of the situation "no matter how disastrous," learning from criticism, emotional

management, and self-awareness were other keys to resilience" (as cited in Isernhagen & Bulkin,

2013, p. 120). Successful female superintendents are zealous in their pursuit of developing

strategies that help manage difficult situations that arise during their tenure. In a qualitative study

of 15 New York female superintendents, researchers discovered five themes that were congruent

with one another. "The analysis if the data revealed five themes associated with female

superintendents becoming more resilient in the face of adversity: (a) Superintendents focus on

being value-driven, not event-driven leaders. They drain their resilience and those they serve if

their response to adversity is based on what is politically expedient at the moment; (b) Resilient

leaders do whatever it takes to assess past and current reality comprehensively. They need to

know the bad news as well as the good news of a given situation so they can make the most informed decision possible; (c) In the face of adversity, resilient leaders stay positive about future possibilities. They believe something desirable can come from setbacks, but they know nothing is guaranteed; (d) Strong leaders draw on a base of caring and support during tough times. This theme permeated all of the interviews. Leaders need a haven to talk about adversity and strategies for moving through the adversity healthily; (e) Resilient leaders act on the courage of their convictions. They realize that convictions without corresponding actions are nothing more than promises unfulfilled" (Reed & Patterson, 2007, p. 98-99). Instead of all the obstacles that face differing gender district leaders, the complexities of education are always changing the landscape of managing a school district. As we progress more accountability for academic gains has been placed on the superintendent's responsibility agenda and has changed leadership practices that favor female superintendents. This will enable the female gender to close the gap in representation in leadership positions and some cases, give females a slight advantage in advancing and sharing the vision of the district.

**Superintendent tenure.** Another issue that we face in this country in addition to the under-representation of females in a district leadership position is the issue of tenure ship in the position of superintendent. Bjork et al. (2005) determined that six years was the average tenure ship for a superintendent. In a study of 215 California superintendents, the length of tenure was averaged at three years due to various reasons besides retirement that contributed to early departures. These early departures can prove to be detrimental to school systems and have lasting negative effects on students and their academic performance. "The superintendent is the chief executive officer of the district, responsible for sharing a clear vision and goals for the school system, building a supportive environment to achieve these goals, evaluating personnel and

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education programs, recruiting educators and leaders with strong qualifications, and managing

district finance efficiently and effectively (Alsbury, 2008; Byrd, Drews, & Johnson, 2006;

Education Writers Association, n.d.; Petersen, 2002; Waters & Marzano, 2006). Superintendent

turnover disrupts district management and can negatively affect staff morale, funding for district

operations, and community support, potentially hurting student achievement (Ray & Marshall,

2005; Waters & Marzano, 2006). Search and recruiting costs for district functions (Metzger,

1997). A superintendent's exit also often derails ongoing district reform efforts, which need

multiple years of sustained nurturing before they take root (Fullan, 2000)" (as cited in Grissom &

Mitani, 2016, p. 352).

As the superintendent position has transformed over time into a complicated and intricate

dynamic leadership position, the success of a school system is reliant upon the leadership

characteristics of someone that can disentangle the educational leadership labyrinth. "Public

schools and the superintendency are facing many challenges in the wake of cultural, political,

economic, and moral challenges that are reforming the basic institutions in our society, including

public schools. Those changes are influencing governance, management, and policy

development in education. The public-school superintendent continues to face controversy

because of the educational and political balance of the position, but in most communities, the

superintendency has been respected. In the past, aspiring superintendents were plentiful because

of the salary package, status, and challenges inherent in the position" (Trevino, Braley, & Slate,

2008, p. 106). Instead of all the social, political, and academic challenges that superintendents

face in the daily operations of running the school district, they are still viewed as the lead

teacher. For example, superintendents must think of diversified student demographics as a

beneficial dynamic that will grow the entire district due to the exposure that all students will

receive in the district from being able to interact with other students with different cultures and backgrounds. This will ultimately aid the closing of academic achievement gaps, which will make the system increase overall growth but it all starts with the leadership provided by the superintendent, thus improving the rate of tenure for this position. "The superintendency has changed. Additional challenges created by heightened public demands for improved student performance even when increasing enrollments of students from more diverse backgrounds are occurring have led to more stress placed on educational leaders. Moreover, teacher and principal shortages, inadequate school funding, deteriorating and crowded school facilities, and excessive time demands have created a leadership crisis. Those complex factors have contributed to a gradual loss of faith in public schools and loss of respect for the position of the public-school superintendent" (Trevino et al., 2008, p. 107).

The many issues that superintendents face that can alter the length of tenure is fiscal responsibilities, establishing and maintaining good relationships with the school board, disseminating the academic student data and being accountable for the proper interventions to address gaps in academic achievement in differing subgroups, creating and maintaining a vision and mission for the school district, and the demands of management decisions that can affect the lives of hundreds of employees and more importantly potentially thousands of student lives. The instability of higher leadership positions is driven by factors listed above and also from personnel aspiring to move to larger school systems or to obtain weightier salary packages in some cases. "Moves are associated not only with large salary raises but also with greater job prestige (as measured by the size of the district), higher student performance, and reductions in the number of low-income students. We also found that rural districts are disadvantaged in the superintendent labor market. Descriptively, they have higher rates of turnover than other locale

types. Also, we uncovered substantial evidence that superintendents tend to move away from positions in rural districts towards positions in more populated urban and suburban areas. Moves of this type are particularly lucrative in terms of annual compensation. The relatively low pay for superintendents in rural districts may be one reason for patterns of consistent with superintendents using jobs in rural districts as "stepping stones" to positions in larger districts, a phenomenon observed in a variety of public sector positions (Grissom & Andersen, 2012; Watson & Hassett, 2004). These mobility patterns may contribute to leadership talent shortages faced by rural school districts (Cooper, Fusarelli, & Carella, 2000; Lamkin, 2006). States and districts may need to take additional steps to increase the attractiveness of superintendent positions in rural areas in order to stem leadership instability" (as cited in Grissom & Mitani, 2016, p. 384).

Robert J. Tekniepe of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas defined factors such as political conflict, employment contracts, internal and external pressures, and fiscal stress were the factors that influenced involuntary turnover.  Political tensions can arise from stress factors on the political climate between the superintendent and the school board; especially if perceptions of one another gleam from the idea that they are inadequately suited to lead due to a lack of knowledge and preparation.

The dynamic relationship between the superintendent and the school board balances on the fine line of give and take. This dynamic can take a negative turn if the relationship between the two positions are not in good standing. This could lead to micromanaging from the board of education and cause the superintendent to leave their leadership position by choice or may be forced out. If the two parties have a good working relationship, then the superintendent should have a longer tenure compared to the previous scenario. Another stress factor that can develop

throughout a superintendent rein is how well they have negotiated their contracts of employment. A properly negotiated contract can combat political firestorms that could otherwise result in job termination and increase leadership stability within the school district. Internal and external pressures are other stress factors that can contribute to an early departure from the leadership position. "A lack of cohesiveness and mutual understanding among principals, faculty members, and superintendents during labor negotiations, labor problems, and other key problem-solving efforts increase the probability of push-induced departures" (Tekniepe, 2015, p. 9). Superintendents that do not value the importance of building relationships within the community and key stakeholders which are grounded in collaboration and servant leadership tend to shorten their tenure and increase their chances of failure in establishing any change initiative or the possibility of a positive academic impact on students.

The community has historically played a key role in the perception of the school system based on the actions of the superintendent and his/her leadership decisions. "When pressures from community stakeholders (such as politicians and business leaders) are minimized, the probability of push-induced departures decreases, but when the superintendent views the school district as disconnected from the personality and life of the community, the probability of pushed-induced departures increases. Many times, community stakeholders are uninformed about a school district's issues and demand actions are solely reflecting their agenda, whether or not they are in the best interest of the community and district" (Tekniepe, 2015, p. 9).

The fiscal stress factor is one that has been around from the beginning of an established education system and this one factor can impact all levels of education, all academic endeavors, and can cause and increased level of tension between the superintendent, school board, teachers, other key stakeholders, and the parents. With the demands of operating a school system at

maximum efficiency with limited resources that seem to be cut every year, the tenure of a district leader can be short from self-imposed movement due to the amount stress that these uncomfortable fiscal pressures bring to the leadership position.

The important aspect of a superintendent leadership tenure is the stability that it brings to the school system. When a superintendent successfully navigates through the stressors of the position all vested interest will thrive in the success that his/her leadership influences which also touches the lives of students through the positive impact the leadership has on academic gains. The contradictory scenario of that picture is the early departure of a district leader. If it takes 3 to 5 years for a change initiative to make an impact on a school system, then one must agree that the negative impact that early departures of a superintendent have a far-reaching negative effect on the school system. "Public school superintendents, educational leaders of present-day public schools, encounter organizational, economic, personnel, and student-related challenges. Governance and financial challenges exist for the superintendent during the day-to-day operations of school districts. If the expectations of society today are to increase student academic performance and attempt to reform our public education system, then the present challenges of the superintendents need to be better understood. Both public school superintendents and stakeholders should work together to improve our school systems" (Trevino et al., 2008, p. 106).

**Factors that Contribute to Early Departure**

"Rural school districts play an integral role in the communities that they serve. Beyond providing students with the basic education and training that are important for securing an economic livelihood, rural school districts also provide economic support and serve as a cultural center in the community. Many researchers have suggested that the survival of rural communities

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depends on creating and sustaining collaborative partnerships with schools (Hobbs,1991; Miller, 1993; Spears, Combs, & Bailey, 1990). It follows, therefore that rural superintendents, acting as the face of their school districts play a critical role in fostering these joint partnerships" (as cited in Tekniepe, 2015, p. 1). With the responsibility of being the face of the school district harbors the accountability of the academic success or failure of the school system. Superintendents must be able to steer through volatile settings that arise out of political conflicts, school boards and their policies, fiscal issues, contract negotiations, faculty and staff conflicts, key stakeholders and the community. These factors do contribute to stressors that are inherent with the district leadership position and can cause an early departure from the position. This early departure can have a far-reaching negative effect upon the school system's stability for the future and the academic performance in the present and long-term. "Role conflict typically arises when a person is faced with expectations requiring behaviors that are mutually competing or opposing (Olk & Friedlander, 1992, p.389). Although many role-conflict situations are temporary, certain roles are continuously subjected to conflicting role demands and expectations. Such is the school superintendent's role. The superintendent's role is considered a high-conflict managerial position (Arnez, 1981; Blumberg, 1985; Boyd, 1982; Jackson, 1995; Kowalski, 1995; Leithwood, 1995; Thody, 1997) since superintendents serve as middlemen and as mediators between conflicting demands and expectations coming from various stakeholders. Thus, superintendents are immersed in a vague and uneasy harmony of opposing forces" (Carter and Cunningham, 1997, p.33) and are "awash in contradictions and anomalies" (Crowson, 1987). These unique role circumstances portray the notion that is a "built-in element of the superintendent job" (Crowson, 1987) and that, being "the DNA of the superintendency" (Cuban, 1985) role conflict is inevitable" (as cited in Nir & Eyal, 2003, p. 547).

Educating students in the 21st century has added additional responsibilities and mandates from the Federal Government that require educators to make adequate academic progress from year to year, mandated testing requirements, and to add to the complexity of this situation we as a nation have grown through a continually increasing population of non-English speaking immigrants with children that have flooded our school systems. The superintendent is held accountable for the academic progress and success and for molding all students through the education that builds a foundation of a future productive U.S. citizen. "The superintendency has changed. Additional challenges created by heightened public demands for improved student performance even when increasing enrollments of students from more diverse backgrounds are occurring have to lead to more stress placed on educational leaders. Moreover, teacher and principal shortages, inadequate school funding, deteriorating and crowded school facilities, and excessive time demands have created a leadership crisis. Those complex factors have contributed to a gradual loss of faith in public schools and loss of respect for the position of the public-school superintendent" (Trevino et al, 2008, p. 107).

Other factors that contribute to the superintendent prematurely leaving the leadership position can be the age of the superintendent. School districts that recruit more experienced superintendents that have a greater depth of knowledge in how to increase academic performance of the students may be at an age that is close to retirement. According to Grissom and Mitani (2016), there is a 20% turnover rate with superintendents, and over half of those district leaders leave the position thus adding to the trend of tenure being around 3 years. Also, older superintendents tend to leave the system sooner than less experienced and younger superintendents. "We also find that the longer a superintendent has been in the current district is, in contrast, associated with a higher likelihood of moving elsewhere rather than leaving the

system altogether. We also find that district academic performance predicts superintendent turnover, but not linearly. Districts with very high and very low-test score performance are less likely than districts in the middle of the performance distribution to lose their superintendent, which may signal competing forces" (Grissom & Mitani, 2016, p. 382). Salary ranges for superintendents tend to affect the tenure of superintendents. Grissom and Mitani (2016) found that for every $10,000 in salary gain, there was a 2 to 3 percent in reduction of early departure from the position. This is strong evidence that an increase in salary has a positive effect on the length of tenure for superintendents. In order to obtain a higher salary, some superintendents in the rural school district may choose to leave the school system for a more urban setting in larger school districts which in turn offer better compensation packages, which can put the rural school districts at a competitive disadvantage with larger districts. "We also found that rural school districts are disadvantaged in the superintendent labor market. Descriptively, they have higher rates of turnover than other locale types. Also, we uncovered substantial evidence that superintendents tend to move away from positions in rural districts toward positions in more populated urban and suburban areas. Moves of this type are particularly lucrative in terms of annual compensation. The relatively low pay for superintendents in rural districts may be one reason for patterns consistent with superintendents using jobs in rural districts as "stepping stones" to positions in larger districts, a phenomenon observed in a variety of public sector positions" (Grissom & Andersen, 2012; Watson & Hassett,2004)" (as cited in Grissom & Mitani, 2016, p. 383-384).

The simple reason of stressors that stem from being placed in the middle of political crossfires that involve key stakeholders, board members, community members, and educators are enough to drive some superintendents out of the profession or system. Thee political issues can

encompass local board policies, differing values, and political ideals. In some systems where the board and superintendents are elected, these political reasons can have such a dynamic impact on perception and can be the cause of early departure from the position. "Iannaccone and Lutz (1970) contended that, when community dissatisfaction with school policy, school board members, or the superintendent reaches a certain critical level, the citizens exercise their power at the polls and defeat an incumbent school board member. Through the election process, the community can change their representative on the board to more closely match their values, and the school board has the power to relieve superintendents of their position, if necessary, to change school policies" (as cited in Alsbury, 2003, p. 692). Some of the policies may affect the finances that are so crucial to the survival of school systems. Every year federal funding for education seems to take a hit due to new political agendas, which are giving birth from organized constituents that do not place school systems at the top of the financial needs priority list. Political pressures can affect the way superintendents decide on how to fund schools which ultimately can have a negative or positive impact upon so many lives. "School superintendents are in charge of large amounts of public funds and are responsible for budgeting, collecting taxes and other revenues, overseeing the district's day-to-day fiscal operations, and reporting the financial status of the district in accordance with professional standards and state and federal statutes and regulations (Hartman & Stefkovich, 2005)" (as cited in Abshier, Harris, & Hopson, 2011, p.1 ). The unique dynamic of public school funding is that it reflects the priorities of the district leadership and has a direct impact on parents, students, teachers, board members, and principals that take pride in their schools; and do not want to see their education system experience hardships but they do want to achieve academic excellence. Successful superintendents are attacking this problem and being proactive in dealing with budget cuts, but

the superintendents that take a more victim approach and are not as vigilant in dealing with these obstacles usually find themselves leaving the superintendent position earlier than they had planned. "School leaders are being asked to stretch existing resources and to do even more with less, while at the same time resources are dwindling and expectations are often escalating (Guthrie, Springer, Rolle, & Houck, 2007; Ramsey, 2001). Adsit and Murdock (2005) suggested there has never been a time in America's history when public schools have experienced such a huge discrepancy between public expectations and the adequacy of school funding" (as cited in Abshier et al., 2011, p. 3). In these complex times for education, the superintendent that extends their time of tenure are the ones that have embraced the ideals of true collaboration. The superintendents that have involved board members, local administrators, teachers, parents, and the community in the process of decisions that directly affect the funding of the school district are the ones that are most successful in their academic endeavors. Moreover, these decisions have a direct effect on the resources made available to schools, thus affecting the academic success of students. This process manifests itself into the form of a superintendent losing their tenure or establishing themselves as positive, impactful leaders that place what is best for students at the top of the priority list.

**Challenges of a Rural Superintendent**

The superintendency is faced with many challenges that must be managed within the guidelines and standards set by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) or the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC). These challenges include but are not limited to centralization of administrative powers, having to be accountable for the responsibilities that accompany multiple job titles, having to operate within a small budget that seems to receive Federal cuts every year, conduct school business within the boundaries that

community connections require, and they face push/pull factors that can influence their management decisions and tenure. There are several social, political, and economic issues at the local, state, and national level that superintendents must be mindful of and have the ability to translate those issues over to setting goals and the direction when leading a school system. This requires diversity in roles and responsibilities that have to be carried out by the district leadership. These diverse roles require a wide range of managerial skills that comes from years of experiences that fine-tune a district leader. Responsibilities can include transportation director, becoming a chief financial officer, has to be versed in the art of elementary and secondary curriculum decisions, able to incorporate new policies that are directed from the board of education that affects the daily operations within the school building, having to build relationships with the media, and also superintendents are the leadership role models for all leaders within the district. "The superintendent of the twenty-first century is faced with greater challenges as opposed to the expectations of the past (Houston, 2001). "While most education reform focuses on accountability, test scores, and standards, the superintendent's job is shaped by issues on a much more macro level" (Houston 2001, p. 430). Kowalski (2013) concurs that the demands of the superintendency have become increasingly complex. Kowalski asserts that the position of superintendent has evolved into a leadership position of (a) teacher-scholar, (b) business manager, (c) democratic leader, (d) social scientist, and (e) effective communicator (p.226). Houston (2001) explains that today's superintendent must completely change their approach to the job from what was once considered a managerial position. "Superintendents of today must be prepared to master the art of connection, communication, collaboration, community building, child advocacy, and curricular choices" (Houston 2001, p.430)" (as cited in Weiss, Templeton, Thompson, & Tremont, 2015, p. 6). Superintendents are also charged with

the responsibility of being an intercessor for all students and ensure that equitable policies are enforced, create cultures of autonomy for building level administrators, establish programs that reach out to the communities and promotes community involvement with the school system, make sure that the curriculum is differentiated so that all students learning styles and levels are addressed, and finally that all curriculum is made relevant to the student population.

Educational finances are another area that presents itself with multiple challenges that the superintendent must overcome and manage in order to become successful. In spite, the significant budget cuts that education has had to endure over the years, district leadership has had the responsibility to increase academic performance with reduced resources that directly affect school systems. This dynamic is causing school leadership in rural school districts across the nation to adopt new policies that require schools to increase student-to-teacher ratios, implement a smaller reduction of the workforce, implementation of fees that have to be absorbed by the parents, and also force school boards to adopt policies that reduce the amount of instruction time that a student receives within the school calendar. "Many small public-school districts across the state of Texas are struggling financially. The adverse financial climate in which small Texas schools find themselves operating is the result of several factors. The primary driver of the state's funding system is enrollment, which means that small schools often have to provide the same services that larger schools do, but with less revenue. In addition to the challenge of having less revenue than larger schools, small schools have a disadvantage on the expenditure side of the budget based on basic market economics. Larger schools often benefit from the effects of the economy of scale while small schools do not. The superintendents of these small districts are searching for ways to increase revenues and reduce expenditures because in many instances, these are the only ways that they will be able to avoid cutting programs, eliminating personnel,

consolidating, or closing down" (Abshier et al, 2011, p. 7). Superintendents of rural school

districts have to grapple with harsh financial choices. In most states, the future financial situation

is not promising as more allocated resource cuts continue to evolve from their respective

governments. This is in addition to working with the board of education while birthing and

adopting a financial budget that not only balances but fulfills the necessary means of providing

free and appropriate education for all students. Establishing a financial budget can be a

complicated and complex problem that requires creative thinking to address all the fluid parts of

a school system that work together for a common goal but do require fiscal support and

accountability. A successful superintendent can learn how to manage this and build the capacity

of their team toward achieving their fiscal and academic goals. Successful superintendents find

ways to keep a positive attitude amid challenges like finances, they take stock in themselves and

invest time to make sure that their health stays intact and that they dedicate time to their families.

Superintendents must always be transparent and be well versed in communication skills when

dealing with finances, especially when faced with the challenge of budget cuts to the school

system. Giving the perplexity of the financial situation that all school systems seem to endure in

the face of growing academic goals mandated by the state and federal governments; district

leadership is in dire need of assistance in learning how to navigate through economic challenges

while maintaining academic excellence. "Demands on school administrators have risen

dramatically, partially due as a result of increased public scrutiny due to escalating costs in

education (Brown & Cornwell, 2000). Consequently, for superintendents, the district budget is a

great source of anxiety (Hayes, 2011). Glass and Franceschini (2007) reported that since 1923,

nearly all of the ten-year studies conducted by the American Association of School

Administrators (AASA) have revealed that superintendents consider their role in school finance to be the source of their most serious challenges" (as cited in Abshier et al., 2011, p. 1).

In addition to smaller economies faced by rural superintendents, other challenges that can and will be faced are the dynamics of community connections and push/pull factors that naturally inherit of the superintendent position. The changing roles of this position were brought about by the demands of federal, state, and local level governances on the school system. Such changes were directly influenced by emanating social, economic, and political contingencies that projected increased academic performances upon the local school systems while having to perform with fewer resources. These fueled demands are driven by the creation of an economy that is accountable on a more global perspective and the well- being of the United States. Thus education demands have increased along with the accountability of the superintendent. "During the past three decades, "widespread concern for the quality of public education launched what is arguably the most intense, comprehensive and sustained effort to improve education in America's history" (Bjork, 2001a, p.19). Since 1983, national commission and task force reports linked the quality of public schooling to the well-being of the country immersed in a highly competitive, global economy. These reports not only examined the condition of education but also heightened expectations for schooling, called for improving instruction, and contributed to fundamentally altering how schools are organized, administered and governed" (as cited in Bjork et al., 2014, p. 2). This altering of school organization, administration, and governance created a new dynamic leadership style that is grounded in collaboration and communication. In the true spirit of collaboration, involving the community and key stakeholders is immanent in the success of today's district school leadership. Rural superintendents are required to serve in multiple capacities and that includes having the capacity of communication. This skill set is required in

order to effectively communicate in our digital society that uses multiple platforms to communicate goals in the digital laden society that we live in today. It is imperative that the superintendent embrace the practices of collaboration and communication to establish important relationships within the community in order to carry out district goals, board policies, and budgets. Other factors that superintendents have to recognize is the push/pull factors that can and will affect the direction of the school district. "Push factors are most commonly associated with pressures that force leaders from their current positions. Push factors that affect rural superintendents can include conflict with the school board pressures from within the community, or simply negative perceptions of the superintendent's ability to adequately manage the fiscal affairs of the district. Pull factors, in contrast, are those typically facilitating his or her opportunity for professional, financial, or personal advancement to another jurisdiction" (Tekniepe, 2015, p. 2). The rural superintendent's position is considered to be one that is distinctive in a public setting that receives much attention due to the dynamics that rural school districts create. This dynamic is fueled by the need of close relationships with key community stakeholders, that could have a negative situation and cause an early departure from the position due to political, economic, or social factors that play a pivotal role in the rural school district. "As Campbell (2001) explained, community stakeholders, special interest groups, and the pressures that they exert can complicate a superintendent's ability to direct the administrative operations of a school district. Therefore, superintendents who are skilled in responding to community and political pressures- with an aim toward mutually beneficial outcomes-might be more likely to avoid push induced departure. A superintendent who does not display the ability to manage the diverse demands of community stakeholders adequately will be at risk of involuntary departure" (as cited in Tekniepe, 2015, p. 3).

**Superintendent Leadership Resiliency**

According to Brackenreed (2010), beginning in the 1950s, there has been a resurgence of interest in the concept of resilience, the positive attributes in individuals and institutions. Studies were focused on what made certain individuals successful and the personal characteristics that manifested themselves in their everyday life despite the hardships that they were enduring. Since that time resilience has been defined in many different ways and contexts. Schwartz (1997) defined resilience as something that promotes compassion, flexibility, and ability to bounce back after an encounter with adversity. Another from Luthar (2006) denotes resilience as the constellation of personality qualities that enables positive adaptation to adversity. Bonanno (2004) described resilience as the ability to maintain equilibrium in the face of unfavorable circumstances, and Wagniald and Young (1993) defined it as moderating the negative effects of stress and promoting adjustment to challenging circumstances. Some researchers believe that resiliency is a built-in individual attribute. These attributes are relaxed predisposition, acceptance, being flexible, malleable, and a controlling attitude. These attributes are the combination of characteristics along with having a string sense of self-efficacy that make up a resilient superintendent.

Resilience is a relational phenomenon in the context of interactions between an individual's surroundings and personal factors. "Student resilience is fostered by interpersonal dynamics, specifically, support from family members, peers, and social and community organizations and institutions" (McMahon, 2006, p. 2). Westfall and Pisapia (1994) and McMahon (2006) reported that the existence of support systems at home, school, and the community engender "the development of constructive personality traits such as self-efficacy, goals orientation, optimism, internal expectations, personal responsibility, and coping ability,

which in turn lead to resiliency. For the present study, the resources that were reviewed revealed a limited amount of research in the context of leadership resiliency. The research did reveal several resources on student resiliency and the resilience of individuals facing adversity.

Within the context of educational leadership, there are many challenges that occur in the daily activities that require a superintendent to possess and apply leadership resiliency skills even in the face of adversity. Patterson et al. (2009) have identified three broad skill sets that a resilient leader must possess; they include resilient thinking skills, capacity skills, and actions skills. Resilient leaders do not always take in the scope or magnitude of a situation but do consciously think about the positives and negatives of the situation with clarity and accuracy. Good leaders seek out all information, positive and negative, in any type of situation that they face and from all parties involved to gain a broader perspective of the situation. A superintendent who faces their daily challenges with a positive outlook and maintains high expectations will have the capacity to reveal the positive out of a negative situation.  The one thing that any leader can depend on that will happen is adversity. A calamity is an imminent event that can range from minuscule to immense. How this calamity is managed is inevitably made by the choices of the leader and how they act in response to adversity. "This choice is determined in part by the skill set of resiliency capacity. Think of resilience capacity as the fuel tank that supplies the necessary energy to produce resilient actions. The amount of fuel in the tank is what leaders depend on to get them through rough waters to safe harbor. At a given point in time, the boundaries of resilient capacity are somewhat defined by a leader's accumulated experiences. The good news is that resilience capacity is elastic over time. As leaders get stronger by successfully confronting adversity, they expand their fuel tank and, by definition, their capacity to successfully weather future storms" (Patterson et al., 2009, p. 9). One of the four sources of fuel that constitutes a

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resilience capacity in leaders is personal values. Personal values can be further broken down into

hierarchical order of ethical values, educational values, and program values. Ethical values are

inviolable in nature and guide leaders in determining what is virtuous or immoral, which exceed

the limits of time and in the context of education, the school district's mission, and vision. The

educational values, which are guided by the mission and vision of the district, which should

directly reflect those core values of the superintendent. The program values are the points of

reference on the compass of ideas of the district and the superintendent. The other sources of fuel

for building capacity in a resilient leader are personal efficacy, personal well-being, and having a

personal support base. It is imperative that a leader has to develop the capacity for personal

efficacy in order to accomplish goals in the face of adversity. This gives the leader confidence to

make critical decisions while maintaining commitments and adhering to core values. "A strong

sense of personal efficacy relates directly to positive personal well-being, a third major energy

source in resilient leaders. This energy source consists of three ingredients: physical well-being,

emotional well-being, and spiritual well-being" (Patterson et al., 2009, p. 10). With any adverse

situation, there will always be obstacles that will block progress and drain the fuel sources of the

superintendent. This makes a support base essential to success in the face of calamity. This

support base is comprised of support from family and friends, co-workers, and mentors, which

re-fuels confidence levels in leaders while working through adverse periods at work.

Superintendents are charged with managing adverse challenges while maintaining

academic goals through the ethical lens of the school district's mission and vision. These

challenges include but are not limited to rising cost, decrease in funding, federal mandates,

increase in poverty, board turnover, teacher morale, and facility issues. Superintendents must

take on a team approach with the support base and develop their coping mechanisms to combat

job stressors. A coping mechanism can simply be the implementation of a lifestyle change. A successful, resilient leader must eat a balanced diet and maintain an exercise program in order to reduce those inevitable job stressors. "Conversely, unhealthy coping mechanisms such as overeating, alcohol or drug abuse, or negative attitudes can lead to negative outcomes, both personally and professionally. Such maladaptive outcomes can be avoided by proactive measures designed to develop resilience and overcome adversity" (Farmer, 2010, p. 2). It is crucial for superintendents to model a healthy lifestyle and resilience, and beneficial by developing these coping mechanisms. This also reflects the school district's leadership commitment to maintaining the district's mission and vision while accomplishing academic goals. Farmer (2010), wrote that adversity provides educational leaders with the opportunity to model in context the very behaviors that they seek to develop in their subordinates. Obstacles can be made into educational objects that are used to demonstrate resilience and thereby allow the educational leader to earn authentic respect from organizational stakeholders. Another important coping mechanism that superintendents need to employ into their daily lives is spiritual renewal. Spiritual renewal has the capacity to allow superintendents to stay focused on goals while operating and managing challenging situations. "By employing healthy coping mechanisms, school leaders can model positive adaptations to difficult circumstances during times of adversity. Current school leaders certainly face tremendous challenges. However, school leadership has never been easy. The incorporation of healthy coping mechanisms into a balanced lifestyle can lead to both positive health benefits and more effective leadership. By utilizing these healthy coping mechanisms as part of their daily life, school leaders are more likely to overcome adversity and accomplish organizational objectives. School leaders employing these healthy coping mechanisms have an increased likelihood of mental, physical, and social vigor.

Through the effective use of healthy coping mechanisms, school leaders develop resilience skills and increase their capacity to overcome adversity" (Farmer, 2010, p. 4). The resilient leader must possess resilient thinking skills. This requires the capacity to comprehend the current position of reality, be able to maintain a positive attitude, envision a solution and direction to take, and learn from the experience.

**Conclusion**

Over the last several decades the role of the school superintendent has changed. This change in leadership characteristics has defined the roles of educational leaders on a global scale as schools strive for excellence in achieving their academic goals. Bjork et al., 2014, found that most analysts agree that efforts to reform schools launched during the past three decades (1983-2014) had a profound impact on superintendents' work. Empirical evidence reveals that superintendents' scope of job responsibilities require them to be good communicators, able to manage, establish themselves as an instructional leader, possess the aptitude of a political leader and in many cases applied social scientist. These responsibilities are carried out in the face of adversity that includes political conflict, fiscal issues on local and federal levels, internal and external pressures, emotional challenges, curriculum, and instructional issues, and multiple job responsibilities. This skill set is a learned technique that is leadership based in resiliency. Resiliency requires the superintendent to possess resilient thinking skills, resilient capacity building skills, and resilient action skills. These skills are grounded in ethics which provides the necessary fuel for the energy required to make mindful decisions.

**Chapter III: Methods**

"Since the mid-1700s, the backbone of American education has been rural education. At that time, of the country's 212,000 one-room schools, ½ of American School children were enrolled" (Canales, Tejada-Delgado, & Slate, 2008). According to the United States Department of Education, nearly 1/3 of American school children attend public schools in rural communities that make up 43 % of all public schools in the United States.  Today the rural school district can be designated into three separate categories that represent different levels of populations. These populations encompass the fringe rural, distant rural, and remote rural geographic locations. The rural fringe district is less than 5 miles from an urban location; the distant rural district is 25 miles from an urbanized area, and the remote rural district is over 25 miles from an urbanized population. Specifically, in Alabama, the National Center of Education Statistics (2010) reveals that the state contains 16 fringe districts, 31 distant districts, and 17 remote districts.  Research reveals that rural superintendents must wear numerous and varied hats to meet the demands of state and federal initiatives, manage local politics and ensure students receive the highest quality of public education (Tobin, 2006).

From reading and analyzing various sources of information on leadership resiliency of rural superintendents; the conceptual framework utilized in this study is around the ideals that even in the toughest of times, educational leaders consistently demonstrate the ability to recover, learn from, and developmentally mature when confronted by chronic crisis adversity. This concept is founded on three broad skill sets that are required of a resilient leader: resilience thinking skills, capacity skills, and action skills. Throughout the research, successful superintendents either possess these skills sets or some combination that contributes to their success as an educational leader. The researcher sought to determine what factors contribute to

the success of superintendents and what factors are responsible for the early departure of superintendents to leave the profession. The definition of a resilient leader is founded on research-based principles and strategies that support leaders as they struggle to successfully overcome adversity (Patterson et al., 2009).

This chapter contains the purpose, significance, research design, research questions, data collection methods, and data analysis. This chapter will discuss the methods used to explain the level of leadership resiliency that rural superintendents possess and how that level of resiliency influences their decision to stay or leave their leadership position. For this study, the most appropriate methodology approach would be a qualitative descriptive study.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study was to explore the extent of resiliency skills sets with rural superintendents. The knowledge of this could assist in determining why superintendents decide on an early departure from their leadership position or to continue with their career. This qualitative descriptive case study focuses on fifteen rural superintendents in south Alabama, who were interviewed to determine the answers to the following questions:

- What are the most important factors that influence a superintendent's decision to stay or leave their leadership role, as measured by interview questions designed to target their responses? How do these factors influence their decisions?

- How do rural superintendents define their professional resiliency as measured by the Leader Resilience Profile (LRP)?

- Do rural superintendents see resiliency as important in their decision to leave or stay in their position? Does resiliency hinder or facilitate their success? In what ways?

**Significance of the Study**

Public schools and the superintendency are facing many challenges in the wake of cultural, political, economic, and moral changes that are reforming the basic institutions in our society, including public schools (Trevino et al., 2008). Resilient leaders may seem like ordinary leaders in ordinary times. However, these times are turbulent times. Today we need extraordinary leaders who find the strength to persevere and endure despite overwhelming obstacles (Patterson et al., 2009). This study is significant because it will add to the body of literature on factors that lead to rural superintendents deciding to stay or leave their leadership position. Additionally, this study will focus on how rural superintendents in Alabama determine factors that influence leadership resiliency.

**Research Design**

The goal of this research was to reveal the factors that influence leadership resiliency and how those factors impact the decision of rural superintendents to stay or leave their leadership position. This study used a qualitative descriptive case study approach to examine relevant issues that were determining factors in the development levels of leadership resiliency. A qualitative study completed by the researcher through a personal interview platform with participants qualifies as a scientific method that contributes to educational research. "This qualitative case study is an approach to research that facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources. This ensures that the issue is not explored through one lens, but rather a variety of lenses which allows for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and

understood" (Baxter & Jack, 2008, pg.#).  A case study should be considered when the study needs to answer "how" and "why questions, when the participants of the study behaviors cannot be manipulated, the researcher wants to cover contextual conditions because they are thought to be relevant to the phenomenon under the study, or the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

When the researcher started this project there were fifteen rural superintendents that were recruited to participate in this study, but the researcher could only obtain a commitment from thirteen rural superintendents in Southeast Alabama. The thirteen cases that are represented in this descriptive case study included the fringe, distant, and remote classifications of a rural school district. The descriptive case study allowed the researcher to examine and study individual cases of factors that influence a superintendent's decision to stay or leave their leadership position. The thirteen rural superintendents participated in a face-to face interview that lasted 30 minutes, voluntarily participated in completing two different surveys. One survey was the Leadership Resiliency Profile that measured their leadership resiliency, and a written Survey of Leadership in Alabama Superintendents (SOLIA) Survey that recorded background/general data information, factors that would or would not lead to the superintendent's early departure from their position, skill level rating, and open-ended questions. This survey successfully captured the demographic information of each participant.

**Validity and Reliability of the Survey Instrument**

As referenced in Chapter 1, the Leadership Resilience Profile (LRP), was used with the 13 participants to measure leadership resilience. Four professors from varying universities with broad experiences in K-12 leadership conducted expansive research with leadership and resilience literature. They established the following leader resilience axioms:

- The idea of leadership resilience is long term and mirrors how a leader manages adverse situations.

- The construct of leadership resilience is within the ideals of someone's leadership role.

- The resilient leader may not reflect the same characteristics of an effective leader.

"Within these assumptions, the research team defines a resilient leader as one who demonstrates the ability to recover, learn from, and developmentally mature when confronted by adversity" (LRP Technical Supplement, 2008, p. 2). The researchers discovered 62 indicators that were comprised of three main themes with twelve subscales. These indicators were used to construct a web-based survey that was administered to an expert panel comprised of senior educational leaders. The survey was created to solicit feedback from the review panel on the validity of the survey accurately measuring leadership resilience. Each item was rated using the following three-point scale:

- A required indicator of a resilient leader.

- Useful but not required.

- Not applicable (This indicator is not relevant in determining the resilience of a leader) (LRP Technical Supplement, 2008).

As part of the validation process of this study, the senior level panelist submitted sixty-seven completed surveys that were used to develop 73 items that were created to measure leadership resiliency. "In advance of distributing the survey, we established a threshold of 'acceptability' if at least 80 percent of the review panel indicated that a specific indicator was required or useful as a demonstration of leader resilience. In other words, we rejected all items as being content valid if a least 20 percent of the panelist marked not applicable in determining

leader resilience…Only one indicator, item, failed to meet the threshold of a valid content measure of leader resilience" (LRP Technical Supplement, 2008, p. 3).

The reliability was assessed in the context of internal consistency and stability over some time. The internal consistency was assessed by administering the LRP to 65 educational leaders. There were 43 surveys completed by the educational leaders. The internal consistencies across the twelve subscales that revealed an Alpha coefficient of at least a .7 for 8 of the subscales and the Alpha coefficient for the other four subscales ranged from 0.6349 to 0.6993 as shown on in Table 1.

The stability of the LRP was examined by using test-retest reliability. For the 43 completed surveys following the administered two rounds, the Pearson correlation coefficients exceeded 0.6 for eleven of the twelve subscales. The three themes and twelve subscale groups are outlined below in Figure 1 and Table 1 respectively:

*Figure 1*. Three themes of the Leadership Resilience Profile (LPR Technical Supplement, 2008).

Table 1. *Internal Consistency/Test Retest Reliability*

| Themes | Number of Items | Internal Consistency Chronbach Alpha's | Test/Retest Reliability |
|---|---|---|---|
| Resilience Thinking Skills | 2 | Understanding Reality = .6349 Optimism = .7971 | Un. Reality = .670 Optimism = .714 |
| Resilience Capacity Skills | 6 | Personal Values = .8629 Personal Efficacy = .7294 Spirituality = .8489 Emotional Well Being = .6663 Physical Well Being = .6850 Personal Support Base = .7619 | Personal Values =.811 Personal Efficacy = .696 Spirituality = .721 Emotional Well Being = .670 Physical Well Being = .670 Personal Support Base = .628 |
| Resilience Action Skills | 4 | Adaptability = .7042 Perseverance = .7462 Decision Making = .6993 Personal Responsibility = .8174 | Adaptability = .532 Perseverance = .636 Decision Making = .686 Personal Responsibility = .758 |

**Conclusion**

This study uses the Leadership Resiliency Profile survey to provide the researchers with a valid and reliable testing instrument that measures leadership resiliency. "Overall, we conclude that the instrument is valid and reliable" (LRP Technical Supplement, 2008, p. 4).

**Research Questions**

This qualitative study addressed three research questions that are grounded in inquiry:

- What are the most important factors that influence a superintendent's decision to stay or leave their leadership role, as measured by interview questions designed to target their responses? How do these factors influence their decisions?

- How do rural superintendents define their professional resiliency as measured by the Leader Resilience Profile (LRP)?

- Do rural superintendents see resiliency as important in their decision to leave or stay in their position? Does resiliency hinder or facilitate their success? In what ways?

**Data Collection**

This study consisted of multiple data collections methods that included an online survey, a paper, and pencil SOLIA Survey, and on-site interviews. The interviews were recorded, and the data was transcribed in order to isolate specific codes, trends, or themes. The interviews were held to a 30-minute time limit out of respect of the superintendent's schedules. Baxter and Jack (2008) stated that the hallmark of a case study is the use of multiple data sources. "Unique in comparison to other qualitative approaches, within case study research, investigators can collect and integrate quantitative survey data, which facilitates reaching a holistic understanding of the phenomenon being studied" (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 554). The authors go on to explain that each data resource is like a piece of the puzzle that when converged adds strength to the discoveries and creates a better understanding of the phenomenon.

For this research study, the data that was collected through interviews was fifteen semi-structured interviews between the participants and the researcher. The data from the interviews provided direct quotes, thoughts, and concerns of each rural superintendent. The multiple data collection methods reveal skills that are required of successful rural superintendents to maintain resilient leadership; and what factors play a role on the decision for the superintendents to leave or stay at their leadership position.

**Data Analysis**

All data that was collected from the multiple sources were analyzed in an organized manner. "One danger associated with the analysis phase is that each data source would be treated

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independently, and the findings reported separately. This is not the purpose of a case study. Rather, the researcher must ensure that the data are converged in an attempt to understand the overall case, not the various parts of the case, or contributing factors that influence the case" (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The data that was collected needed to be transposed into relevant codes that relate to this study. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), after the data has been collected a crucial step is the creation of coding categories in the data analysis. The data collection and analysis can be an imposing part of the research process. Data analysis requires several steps to complete: first, the researcher has to organize all data, thoroughly analyze the data, isolate codes, trends, and themes, and finally accurately reporting the data.

Once the analysis was completed by the researcher and the codes and themes were transcribed, the researcher began triangulation of the data. Triangulation is the procedure used to establish the validity has been met. Triangulation is both possible and necessary because research is a process of discovery in which the genuine meaning residing within an action or event can be best uncovered by viewing it from different vantage points (Schwandt, 1989). To further validate the data, the researcher conducted peer debriefings for each of the case studies.

**Coding Process**

In order to process and analyze the data that is derived from various research data, the researcher must instigate the practice of coding. This allows the researcher to make data relevant and meaningful in the study, which is conducive to a deeper understanding of the research that allows the data to be categorized, connect relationships between data sets, and forms commonalities among the phenomenon that are derived from each case study. "Codes or categories are tags or labels for allocating units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a case study. Codes are usually attached to chunks of varying size

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words, phrases, sentences, or whole paragraphs, connected or unconnected to a specific setting" (Basit, 2003, p. 144). The coding process is continuously comparing different data sets in order to establish necessary codes or categories, this aids in the process of disseminating the data from research and grouping key points of research into themes that are the basis for hypothesis in the dissertation.

**Assumptions**

The following assumptions were made about this study:

- The responses received from the participants would accurately reflect their professional opinions.

- All participants will answer all open-ended questions genuinely and honestly.

- The participants will be asked the same questions however, based on conversations, additional questions may be added to some interview.

- Participants will not be pressured nor coerced in any way to provide sensitive information relative to their school districts.

**Background of Participants**

The fifteen participants were selected based on geographic locations and populations. The rural classification is broken down into three distinct categories in the state of Alabama. According to the 2010 National Center of Educational Statistics, classifies a rural area as fringe, distinct, and remote. The rural fringe area was defined by the census as a territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster. The distant rural area is defined as a rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an urban cluster. The

remote rural area is defined as a rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an urbanized area

and is also more than 10 miles from an urban cluster. Participant backgrounds are outlined in

Table 2 below.

Table 2. *Participant location.*

| Rural Area Distance | System | Superintendent |
|---|---|---|
| **Fringe**<br>**0 – 5 Miles** | National County<br>Phillies County<br>Boston City<br>Brave City<br>Marlin City | Mr. Homerun Derby<br>Mr. Big Pitcher<br>Mr. Red Sox<br>Dr. Knock a Homa<br>Dr. The Fish |
| **Distant**<br>**5 – 25 Miles** | Rams County<br>Astro County<br>Padre County<br>Dodger City<br>Atlanta City | Mrs. Georgia Dawg<br>Mr. Big League<br>Dr. Homer Run<br>Mr. Tee Lasorta<br>Dr. Chop Shop |
| **Remote**<br>➢ **25 Miles** | Falcon County<br>Saints County<br>Tampa Bay County<br>Arlington County<br>Tennessee County | Mrs. Matty Ice<br>Mr. Cool Breeze<br>Mr. Black Beard<br>Dr. Dallas Cowboy<br>Mr. AJ Titan |

**Credibility**

The credibility of this research was established in an agreement to report valid

information from each participant. The responsibility of the researcher is to be truthful in all

reporting and establish value in the study. In order to achieve credibility, the researcher

performed the following: reviewed data multiple times to capture all important details and

phenomenon that may be present in the research data, triangulate all data, and aligning the

correct data with each participant.

**Ethical Conditions**

A contractual agreement is explaining the purpose of the research and obtained approval

from Auburn University and its Institutional Review Board (IRB) on 08/10/2018   (see Appendix

A). The participants signed an informed consent document that informed them of the right to withdraw from participation without penalty, which was explained to all of the participants.

**Role of the Researcher**

The researcher is a doctoral student pursuing a Ph.D. in Elementary and Secondary Supervision. The researcher interviewed fifteen rural superintendents that included one that was in the same district that the principal works. The primary role of the researcher was to conduct interviews with the rural superintendents and gather data on leadership resiliency and what factors can influence the decision to leave the profession or maintain their leadership position.

**Limitations**

As the researcher of this study, I will identify my own beliefs, biases, and values before conducting the survey and subsequently after its analysis. The study will not include the thoughts and observations of other school district personnel on the context of resilient leadership with their respective superintendent. Conclusions drawn from this study may or may not apply to similar cases with rural school district leadership. Additional studies are needed to add to the existing research and knowledge on this topic.

**Summary**

From my research with this study, it is common knowledge that most research is focused around the urban school settings and urban leadership of those school systems. There is research in the context of rural superintendents, but that data is limited in quantity compared to research on urban superintendents. The 2010 National Center of Educational Statistics defines rural into three distinct areas about geographic location to an urbanized area or cluster. The position of superintendent of education has been widely studied but not within the parameters of the three rural classifications from the NCES. Less is known regarding rural superintendency and the

context of leadership resiliency even less is known regarding the rural superintendent. This study

will add to the body of literature for leadership resiliency with rural superintendents.

## Chapter IV: Results

This chapter will report the findings from the present study concerning rural superintendent leadership resiliency. Each superintendent that was interviewed shared the experiences that defined their leadership resiliency and prepared them to assume the superintendency position. Throughout the study, the researcher was able to describe and identify themes that addressed the following research questions: (1) how rural superintendents define their professional resiliency, (2) the most important factors that influence a superintendent's decision to stay or leave their leadership role, and (3) how resiliency affects the success of rural superintendents.

The history of the office of superintendent dates back to the mid-19th century. The position of superintendent and the responsibilities that accompanied this office were influenced and directed by changes in economic, social, political, and technological changes in the United States. From the earlier characterizations of teacher-leader to today's school district CEOs, the roles and responsibilities have grown to encompass not only educational change initiatives but have also morphed to managers of resources for the local school district. "As the CEO of the school district, the superintendent is responsible for ensuring that legislated mandates, policies and regulations are implemented properly and for providing oversight and support to local schools" (Bjork et al., 2014a). This role is in addition to the many roles and responsibilities of the rural superintendent. Rural school district boundaries can be geographically described by their relative location to a major population. The classifications are rural fringe, rural distant, and rural remote (NCES, 2012). "These superintendents differ in some respects from their counterparts in urban, town, and suburban locales, as some research shows. Furthermore, their

leadership inevitably involves challenges that differ from those encountered by superintendents of schools in nonrural places" (Howley et al., 2014, p. 619).

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study is to explore the extent of resiliency skill sets with the rural superintendents. The knowledge of this could assist in determining why superintendents decide on an early departure from their leadership position or to continue with their career. There were thirteen superintendents selected from rural school systems in Southeast Alabama to participate in this study. This study examined the factors that define leadership resiliency, influence a superintendent's decision to stay or leave their leadership role, and how resiliency hinders or facilitates their success.

**Data Collection Procedures**

The data collection procedures included interpreting and analyzing three data sources in the study. The three data sources included the following: in-depth face-to-face interviews, the SOLIA Survey, and the Leadership Resilience Profile Survey. All sources of data revealed factors that influence a rural superintendent's decision to stay or leave their leadership positions, how resiliency facilitates or hinders their success, and defines leadership resiliency. An interview script was developed that was based on a predetermined list of interview questions that each participant was asked in a face-to-face meeting. The questions were developed by the researcher to gain insight on how factors affect leadership resiliency with rural superintendents, and they were categorized by the research questions that guided this qualitative descriptive case study. The data from the questions were grouped under the following: defined professional resiliency, factors that influence superintendent tenure, and factors that hinder or facilitate successful rural superintendents. The questions were designed and asked in a format that would be conducive to the participants engaging in the interview with the researcher without fear of breach of

confidentiality and an environment that achieved honest and open responses. The researcher wanted to create an atmosphere of trust that allowed the superintendents to reveal experiences that helped to build or influence their leadership resiliency.

Throughout the process of collecting data, the face-to-face interviews were transcribed and reviewed for common themes. The interview data allowed the researcher to accurately describe and interpret real-life experiences of the participants. The data from this research was detailed for each participant and provided multiple codes and themes. The SOLIA Survey that was developed for superintendents was designed to elaborate on experiences that helped to define each participants leadership resiliency developed throughout their careers. The online survey that each participant completed assisted the other research tools in capturing experiences that defined the leadership resiliency. "The purpose of the Leadership Resiliency Profile (LRP) is to provide you an individualized profile of your resilience strengths" (Patterson et al., 2009, p. 13).

**Research Questions**

The present study was designed to answer the following questions:

- Question 1: How do rural superintendents define their professional resiliency?

- Question 2: What are the most important factors that influence a superintendent's the decision to stay or leave their leadership role?

- Question 3: Does resiliency hinder or facilitate their success?

**Setting**

This study occurred in a southern state with a population of 4.863 million people within a southeast region of that state that is defined by a region that is generally rural in location. The interviews were conducted with 13 superintendents that were located in rural school districts.

The superintendents were selected because they were geographically located within one of three qualifying descriptors of rural representing three different levels of populations. In Alabama, the NCES (2010) indicates that these populations encompass the fringe rural, distant rural, and remote rural districts, that respectively within 5, 25, or 25+ miles from an urbanized area. The superintendents were selected because their school district was located within one of the three classifications of rural.

**Participant's Background**

| Superintendent | Gender | Age | Race | Education | Years as Superintendent | Year Eligible for Retirement | When do you plan to retire? |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Female | 40-49 | Caucasian | Ed. S | 6 | 2018 | Not Sure |
| 2 | Male | 60-69 | Caucasian | PhD | 15 | 2018 | Not Sure |
| 3 | Male | 40-49 | Caucasian | Ed. S | 1 | 2025 | 2025 |
| 4 | Male | 50-59 | Caucasian | MS | 1.5 | 2019 | 2024 |
| 5 | Male | 40-49 | Caucasian | MS | 1.5 | 2016 | Not Sure |
| 6 | Male | 40-49 | Caucasian | MS | 2 | 2022 | 2024 |
| 7 | Male | 40-49 | Caucasian | PhD | 7 | 2026 | 2026 |
| 8 | Male | 40-49 | Caucasian | MS | .5 | 2020 | 2025 |
| 9 | Male | 40-49 | African American | PhD | 1 | 2020 | 2020 |
| 10 | Male | 60-69 | Caucasian | PhD | 4 | 2018 | 2020 |
| 11 | Male | 50-59 | Caucasian | BS | 5 | N/A | 2021 |
| 12 | Male | 50-59 | Caucasian | PhD | 1 | N/A | Not Sure |
| 13 | Male | 50-59 | Caucasian | Ed.S | 1 | 2018 | Not Sure |

**Participants**

A total of 13 participants from differing school districts were chosen from the 64 rural school districts in the state of Alabama. These participants were superintendents that led school districts that qualified as either fringe, distant, or remote rural school districts. The superintendents that participated in this study were made up of one female and 12 male superintendents. Of the 13 superintendents, five males had earned doctoral degrees.

The experiences of the thirteen participants were told through the interview process using their own words. The transcriptions of the interviews were analyzed to identify themes for each research question. In addition to the data collected from the face-to-face-interviews, additional data were collected from the SOLIA Surveys and from the Leadership Resiliency Profile (LRP) that was completed online by each participant. The LRP included a scale of low to high resilience strength score that included 11 subscales that were classified under the three themes of leader resilience thinking skills, leader resilience capacity skills, and leader resilience action skills. After analyzing all of the data, common themes were used to centralize individual experiences and determine how leadership resiliency is developed and discover the resiliency factors that contribute or diminish the rural superintendent's departure from this position. These findings are organized into the following sections: how rural superintendents define their professional resiliency, the most important factors that influence a superintendent's decision to stay or leave their leadership role, and how resiliency affects the success of rural superintendents.

**How Rural Superintendents Define their Professional Resiliency**

The first research question addresses how rural superintendents defines their professional resiliency. The participant's responses were very genuine and able to reveal insights on leadership resiliency from a rural superintendent's perspective that are based on past

experiences. The researcher found that the participants provided enough detail for each interview question which in turn established the following themes. The themes that were developed for research question one was as follows: a positive relationship with the school board, established communication with the school board, establishing roles of the school board, supportive network, making decisions, envision future, and positive outlook.

      **Positive relationships with the school board.** Throughout all the researcher's superintendent interviews, all thirteen participants agreed that cultivating a positive relationship with the school board was critical and was very important to establish a collaborative working relationship with the school board. Being the chief executive officer in the school district, it was critical to develop positive relationships. To implement school board policies, carrying the vision and mission of the school district, adopting research-based educational programs, maintaining a budget and managing staff, all superintendents agreed that to accomplish all of these responsibilities, establishing a positive relationship with the school board was very important. Respondent R5 shared how important it was to establish a positive relationship with the school board:

> *It is very important. They are the ones that vote on policy and big-ticket items in the school. If you don't have some level of trust with them, then it can be very difficult to build the resiliency that one needs to lead a school system and to be successful at accomplishing your goals.*

Respondent R11 commented on a current situation that he is dealing with from within his school district and how a good relationship with the board helps him to deal with that issue. Respondent R11 shared:

> *Very important. This situation I have been dealing with, it would be hard to solve if I did not have a good relationship. But you know I can pick up the phone and call any one of them at any time, explain to them this going on in your district, you know give me some*

*feedback, what about this person, tell me what you know because they will know*

*something. And I have that kind of relationship will all five of my board members and if I*

*didn't, it would be tough. You would be on an island, you would be making decisions in*

*your own and it would be a deficit to the level of resiliency that you would need to be a*

*superintendent.*

While establishing positive relationships with the school board is very important, it is critical to

establish communication with the school board. Respondent R12 gave a unique perspective on

the superintendent and school board relationship:

*It's something you're always working on. But a lot of what we do in education is like*

*lawn maintenance. You go out there and cut grass, trim yard, and everything looks good,*

*and you say, well I'm done forever…well no, next week I gotta be back out there doing it*

*again. It's the same thing with board relations; it's communicating effectively; I do not*

*want them to hear any big deals before they have heard it from me.*

Respondent R10 shared how important it is to establish an open line of communication with the

board of education to advert any surprises and keeping them informed of any issues within the

district:

*I try to keep them informed. I try to communicate with them a lot. And I think they*

*appreciate that. They told me the other night; we will let you know when you send us to*

*much stuff. They are appreciative of being in the information loop. You're not allowed to*

*pole them; you're not allowed to ask them their opinion, this is getting ready to come up,*

*get ready for it. I think that because I never try to surprise them in a board meeting, and I*

*appreciate when they don't surprise me in a board meeting. And that makes meetings o*

*much smoother…So yea, communication with the board, I talk to them every day I send*

*them an information document once per day, sometimes three times a day through e-mail.*

Respondent R8 also commented on how he does not like to surprise his board and how board

relationships and superintendent tenure are related:

*That's vital, so many; you look at the average life of a superintendent as far as their*

*career. A lot of times it's 2 ½ to 3 years. And so, part of that is because of the*

*collaboration and working relationship between the superintendent and the board. So, I*

*try to do a good job of communicating with them of what is going on. Again, going back*

*to surprises, I told them I don't like surprises, you don't like surprises. If there are things*

*you hear, please let me know, and we'll do the same. I would say for 6 months, we've had*

*a good relationship, they could always be better, but they have been good to work with. I*

*talk to my board chairman a couple of times per week. The other ones I talk to as needed.*

Respondent R9, who was my only African American Superintendent said:

*It's that working relationship that we have, it's that trust that when I come to them with*

*something, they know, we need to do this. There is nothing that has been voted down*

*since I have been here. I would never bring them anything that would be voted down. So,*

*there is this relationship of openness, trust, love, no matter what, we are always going to*

*be professional. We are not going to be arguing in front of everyone. And not even in*

*closed settings, we might disagree on some things. So, I would say look, I understand and*

*let's work through it, but our relationship is awesome.*

The participants all agree that it is very important to establish a positive relationship with

the school board and to establish communication with them in order to build upon their

resiliency as a leader. It seems through the responses of the superintendents that board members

like to be kept within the information loop and that they do not like surprises to erupt when they

least expect it. And for a superintendent to be successful, the respondents agree that

communication was a skill set that had to be possessed and exercised with the school board.

**Establishing roles of the school board.** In order for a superintendent to be able to

increase their professional resiliency, the board of education has to be educated on their roles as

a governing board for the school district. Respondent R12 describes the situation that he

inherited in becoming a superintendent of a newer school system and a very young board that

needed guidance:

*At the same time one of the things that you have to do is you have to train your board. In*

*order to build upon your leadership resiliency everyone has to know their perspective*

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*roles. We're a three-year-old school system, I don't have a single board member who has been in this board for more than three years. So, being able to work with them in a congenial way, teach them what is fair and what is not, and communicate effectively and well; and get them to learn that communication, that's a big piece of the job. And sometimes that takes a lot of time; it takes more time than you realize. It takes meeting them one at a time, for breakfast, or lunch. I try to do that every month. Sending out e-mails, I had to admonish them, telling them not to reply all, so we do not have an illegal board meeting. That's the law. I can send ya'll the information but, don't start discussing it before the board meeting, that is illegal! But, these kinds of things you have to teach, but you have to do it in such a way that you don't offend.*

The dynamic of having to manage a board that has five to seven members who may all have different agendas can be a challenge to manage. They have to be carefully educated through the legal ramifications of their actions and responsibilities that they have to the school district.

R1 commented:

*I have five different board members, and they have five different personalities. This one may be interested in finance, this one may be interested in athletics, this one may not be interested in anything, you kind of have to know what they want. I have a couple who think they can problem solve and tell me how to do it. So, then I say ok, I thought about that, I try to play dumb, and explain with the law that you cannot do that, without making them feel like they are stupid. So, that's the dynamic that dealing with the board separates a superintendent from being a principal. That is the different part.*

R3 also commented on why it is important to educate board members on their roles:

*Sometimes, board members ideas are a little out there, and you got to kind of sit down with them and reel it in a little bit and say, that's not really how it works, or this is why we can't do this. They just don't know why we can't do it this way. This could create a situation that would challenge the leadership resiliency of a superintendent.*

R5 commented on how knowing roles and expectations up front will help the people that make up the district to be successful:

*I have been fortunate enough to be able to sit down with board members to discuss their*

*role, my roles, and everybody else's role. There is nothing more frustrating to people,*

*than unclear expectations for board members, teachers, students. If expectations are*

*clear upfront, most people are going to try and meet those.*

Some superintendents are fortunate enough to have a strong working relationship with the board

that is built on mutual trust. Respondent R11 stated:

*I am very fortunate; we have a good board. They listen to me, and they trust me on what*

*needs to be done. They don't question me about things, but I keep them informed, texting,*

*calling. This relationship helps me to rely upon my resiliency in complicated or heated*

*situations.*

Having multiple personalities on the board requires differing levels of education. Some board

members like to have the basic information and some members prefer to learn how education

works and the mandates that are required of a public school system. Also, some board members

like to learn from different employees on the central office staff. Respondent R7 provided the

researcher with some incite to this interesting dynamic:

*I try to keep them up to date with everything. The partnership I have with my CFO, who*

*works in conjunction with them as well. I have one board member who likes to talk with*

*our CFO, and other members I can give that elementary explanation, quick to the point.*

**Supportive network.** A superintendent has a critical responsibility in leading and

growing a school system toward being successful. To be successful in education at any level,

administration leadership has to develop a network of support. This network can influence a

systems prosperity and improvement as well as the advancement and maturation of a

superintendent by keeping them abreast of current issues. Respondent R12 did a great job in

revealing how important a diverse network can influence the success of a superintendent:

*I'm a big believer in growing and building your network. And that becomes critical to*

*your growth and our school system's ability to grow. So, for me it's the school*

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*superintendent's association, CLAS, Auburn University, made contacts, and in rows at*
*Troy University, AUM, and Alabama State. You start growing those network pieces. I get*
*the chance to be in the Texas Superintendent's Academy this year. So now I got friends*
*out there, and I get text messages from them and talking about stuff and different things;*
*you just start getting information and using things like group text messages, using twitter*
*to keep up with what's happening. And then staying involved on the front end of*
*education, so you know and understand what the issues are. There are things that I*
*believe wholeheartedly in going to National Conferences at least every other year. I'm*
*involved in a group called Century Club 100, that is two superintendents from each state.*
*So, you meet at the AASA every year, and it's a discussion group on issues in education*
*and hear from other states and get outside the little echo chamber the state becomes. And*
*you start to learn some other things that are helpful and little things you load your gun*
*with. This supportive network assists me in not only maintaining my leadership resiliency*
*but it also helps to strengthen it due to the resources that I can rely on when needed.*

Respondent R6 commented on how the central office staff serves as a valuable resource to help

run the school district:

*The main resource is the people around me, personnel, my staff, I have a great CFO, and*
*a great Association Superintendent. The three of us meet almost every day we talk about*
*issues. And my whole staff, something that I implemented as well, on Monday mornings,*
*my whole staff sits around the table, and we go around the room, and everybody tells me*
*what they got planned for the week; what they need help with, or if they got a problem or*
*an issue.*

The researcher discovered through the interview process with the participants that some

superintendents include state organizations and legal advisory through board attorneys in their

network which enables them to build upon their leadership resiliency. Other sources that were

revealed were former superintendents of education and current superintendents of education

from multiple states within their network.

R10 stated:

*There are a couple of other resources that I would say benefit or contribute to my leadership resiliency. There are two state organizations that I lean on pretty heavily, AASB for school board type issues. I lean on the School Superintendents of Alabama (SSA) for information on my side of the table; use our board attorney quite a bit, he is local and does more for our local stuff and he's not by profession a school board attorney, but he has been our school board attorney for 30 years. Been there a long time, we rely on him for that, so when we get into something really serious, like a special education case, we go to a Montgomery for that. But, Henry will do all our local stuff, he comes to every one of our board meetings, unless he is sick or out of town, but he's almost always there and provides us that, he's a good resource too. I run a lot of stuff past him; I will ask him what he thinks of this or what do you think if that, so he is very helpful.*

R9 reaffirmed this by stating:

*I feel that my leadership resiliency is stronger when I utilize our state department of education. I utilize the State Department; they are experts up there, I'm a firm believer in making sure that there is a collaboration with the State Department and our schools. I utilize other colleagues who are former superintendents, sitting superintendents, not just here in Alabama, but in Georgia. I use online, everything you can think about in terms of Association of School Superintendents, the Alabama Association of School Boards.*

R13 added:

*Knowing people at the State Department, knowing my vendors, being able to reach outside and pull people in…*

**Making decisions.** The common good for the school district has to take precedent in how resilient leaders make decisions. This requires character, courage, and integrity of district leadership that is grounded in strong principles. "Courage and character are frequently referred to as 'having a backbone,' which requires resilience coupled with the strength of purpose – both essential to the concept of the character. In the heat of controversy and struggle, courageous leaders remain steady in their principles and don't fall prey to the forces that want to deter them

from doing what is right. They are driven by principle, not their own attachment to popularity, position, standing, or security. Nor do they succumb to the advice of colleagues or others if it is contrary to their values and principles" (Patterson et al. 2009, p. 138).  Respondent R1 did a good job in describing the makeup of what it takes to make the tough decisions that have an impact on the big picture:

> *When you're faced with two opposing viewpoints or sides, and each one has merit; what you got to do is figure out what is the right thing to do and do it. And when you do that, even though you know that you may offend one group, as long as you feel like you're doing the right thing, then I think you can walk away from it. You may take your hits, but if you feel like you've done the best thing, the right thing to do, then I think you can cope with it better. Being able to work through this process of doing what is right for the system, your leadership resiliency may be challenged but at the end of the day you have done what is right, and you will be stronger for it.  I think what hangs on people; they did not do their homework, maybe they did not consider everything, maybe they did not dig deep enough in the issue to understand it. Then you make a decision, and you realize it was not the best decision, but the reason that it was not the best decision is because you did not get enough information.*

**Superintendent's Decision to Leave or Stay**

The second question focused on the most factors that influence a superintendent's decision to stay or leave their leadership role. The responses from the participants revealed various common factors that would influence the participants to stay or leave their position. The common factors that influenced the superintendents to leave or stay in their position were the following: Job stress, negative health issues, issues with the family, career burnout, issues with their finances, feel unsupported, are not being effective on the job, bad board of education relationships, and loss of the elected superintendent position. Factors that would have the

greatest influence not to retire were still being able to make a difference/job satisfaction; finances were in a good position, good health, love of the kids, and support from all stakeholders.

**Job stress.** One theme that emerged from the participant's responses that had the potential to cause an early departure from their leadership role was job stress. Occupational stressors can be a direct result of work overload, fiscal responsibilities, and personnel responsibilities. If a superintendent has not developed methods to deal with occupational stressors, then the daily responsibilities of the job could cause a superintendent to leave their profession.

R11 has been a superintendent for five years; he feels that occupational stressors can hurt a person's emotional and physical wellbeing. He reported his take on how stress can lead to an early departure from the position:

> *I would think that most superintendents would say that the stress and pressure of the job wear on you emotionally and physically. And so, you get to that point in your career where you can retire, and it becomes a matter of can you do the job if you can stay with it, and what is the job doing to you personally. What is it costing you in emotional and physical terms?*

R4 added: *I always worry about that, even because there is so much stress in the rural system just because of the money factors.*

**Health issues.** Participants (R1, R5, R7) commonly reported that health would be a factor that could lead to an early departure from their role. The occupational stressors on superintendents over a long period can have negative consequences on their emotional and physical wellbeing. Participant R1 stated that not only her health but the health of her family could also have the greatest influence on her decision to leave her position early.

R1 commented: *Health issues, husband had health issues, a family member that had health issues.*

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**Family Issues.** Participants (R1, R2, R3, & R7) all responded that family issues would be a factor that could lead to an early departure from their leadership position. Participant R3 responded specifically about a need to provide additional time for his children.

R3 stated: *Having children entering college around that time and freeing up time for them.*

**Burnout.** "The responsibilities and problems inherent in the position of superintendent of schools are wide in scope and variety. Often, superintendents must lead in an environment in which they are isolated, where the responsibilities are numerous, and where they have limited number of allies and supports" (Litchka, Fenzel, & Polka, 2009, p. 2).

R4 provides a specific example of the described situation that could lead to career burnout below:

> *Burnout, probably something that everyone approaches one day in the future. I always worry about that, even because there is so much stress in the rural system just because of money factors.*

Respondents (R1, R6, & R11) all mentioned that burnout could also be a factor that would have influence a decision of leaving their position earlier than planned.

**Finances.** Finances seem to be an ongoing issue within the education system that is driven by federal budget cuts and growing state mandates. "Federal stimulus funds are drying up. Districts are hard pressed to raise additional local funds. And states are making deep cuts in their share of K-12 education funding…. When districts have to lay off teachers, eliminate professional development opportunities, reduce support services, and end effective programs like dropout prevention, students are bound to suffer" (The Center for Public Education, 2010).

R4 discussed how financial issues can lead to stress within the rural school system below:

*I always worry about that, even because there is so much stress in the rural system just because of the money factors. We are not an Enterprise, Houston County, Dale County, or Dothan City. I am trying to find the right amount of money to make the system work.*

R7 discussed how finances could be a factor to influence him into a decision to leave the profession early or not below:

*You know I thought about that, even when I was doing my dissertation. Ultimately, I think it comes down to finances. You know finances can be if I can adequately provide for my family, and even in retired life, I can function and not a wealthy or extravagant way, but where we can be happy, and I can do for future grandkids and these type things. But I think finances would be the number one thing if I could financially afford to retire to get out of the profession.*

R10 added: *I am going to retire in two years. There are frustrations with the positions that are ongoing, that if you didn't have a mind to retire, like finding issues, community issues, stuff like that.*

**Board relations/support level.** The dynamic of the relationship between the superintendent and the board of education can have a direct impact on the tenure of the superintendent and the success of school system. The key to a superintendent's success is the establishment of a collaborative working relationship with the school board that is founded on consistent communication.

R9 responded with the superintendent, and the board is similar to a marriage, and that relationship can dictate when a superintendent may need to leave the system due to fit. R9 provided the following analogy:

*I would say if things were different with the type of board that I have. If you know, if I felt like we were not on the same page, we're not going to agree 100%, but if I felt we were not moving cohesively together as a team, I would feel like that would be enough. Because, that would be noticeable to the community, to our kids. I have to always remain true to myself. I never want to be in a situation where it's not a good fit. So, there is a*

*great sense of humility that comes with, you know my philosophy in life is, the higher one*
*goes in life, the more humble one must become. With that humility, you have to know*
*when it might not be a good fit, or marriage. Because I do believe that being a*
*superintendent and working with the board and having that board governance,*
*leadership team, that is a marriage. And if it gets to a point it's not working out, you have*
*to do what's in the best interest of children and allow them to find someone else who is*
*the best fit.*

R12 also reported that if he felt that the board did not want him in that leadership

position, then he would have to leave this position with the following:

*I guess if they did not want me. I have never been anywhere that they did not want me. I*
*have been here a little over a year, and I don't see any reason that I am going to leave*
*here anytime soon. We have got a lot of work to do and a lot of growth to accomplish.*
*And I want to make sure what I do when I do leave, that there is something that we have*
*done.*

R2 reported that building trust and keeping the board informed is the factors that make a

superintendent successful and that relationship can affect your decision to leave or stay in the

position.

*We have an excellent school board. We have a six-member elected board, and they are*
*rock solid. They understand what their role is and they let me be the chief executive.*
*Being around my colleagues. I hear horror stories about working with different board*
*members; we've just never had that here. I think successful superintendents spend a lot of*
*time working with their board members and making sure that they are informed first and*
*foremost. It's really critical and important that your truthful with them, because if you*
*want them to turn you lose to be chief executive, then they have to trust you. It's all about*
*the relationships.*

**No longer effective.** Three of the rural superintendents (R4, R5, R8) reported that if they

could not be effective or felt that they were no longer effective in their role, then they would

consider leaving their leadership role.

R5 commented on a factor that would cause him to leave his position early: *If I found that I was not effective anymore and I was not able to lead our school system effectively for whatever reason that would be.*

R8 responded: *I would say that being effective. In my eyes, if I didn't feel like I was being an effective leader, then I would think in my eyes that it was time to do something else.*

**Loss of elected position.** There is a growing debate in Montgomery about the validity of having an elected superintendent compared to a non-elected superintendent. Most of the thirteen superintendents that participated in this research were board appointed superintendents. There were a few individuals that were elected superintendents, which are always thinking about campaigning for re-election to the point that it was the one factor that would cause the superintendent to leave their role earlier than what was originally planned.

R6 did a good job of explaining his situation and an alternative plan in case he was to lose an election for the superintendent's position.

> *The only way that I would leave my current position would be to lose the election; I am an elected superintendent. In 2020 I am up for re-election, and I am running for re-election. If I lose, I would be placed somewhere in the system because I am a tenured employee and I am not going to leave home.*

With factors that would have the greatest influence on a superintendent's decision to stay in their leadership position, seven of the thirteen superintendents that I interviewed said that being able to make a difference would be a factor to make them stay in their current position.

R1 stated:
> *I feel like I still have something to give. I feel like that, I mean I do. This is my 26th year so I could technically could retire, but I feel like I still have a drive to make things better. I'm very driven.*

R2 talks about a culture that has been developed and how his team works well together.

*I believe that we have a very good culture here at Pike County. The leadership team here is a very strong leadership team. We work together well, it's a professional, very professional group and they all, we all share the same set of core values and a commitment to kids.*

R3 also talks about the love of his school system. *The love of this system, and that it's small enough that you know everybody, it's easy to get along.*

R4 discusses being able to provide for his system and making the community happy is a factor that would influence him to stay in his position.

*Success. Making sure that schools get what they need, and able to provide that is a big thing. This being an elected position, not being appointed, you know I have to answer to the people, not the board so much. And, when the community is happy, I am happy.*

R5 also stated for a factor that would have the greatest influence on a decision to stay in his current leadership position. *If I feel I was being effective, and I felt like we're achieving our goals and heading in the right direction, that would inspire me to stay.*

R11 responded: *I think that anybody would hope that the job their doing is helping to contribute to a positive outcome in the school system. That your having an impact on the educational system, on the kids, that your hopefully doing good work.*

Another factor that would have the greatest influence on their decision to stay in a current leadership position was a good financial situation that was commonly stated by participants (R1, R3, R6, R7, and R11).

Participants (R2, R3, R4, R8, R11) all commented in their interview that good relationships with their boards of education and support from the board and all stakeholders were a factor in determining if they would decide to stay in their leadership position. Moreover, one participant (R2) stated that the love of the kids was a major factor that would influence his decision to continue the superintendency position.

**How Resiliency Affects the Success of Rural Superintendents**

"Even in the toughest of times, educational leaders consistently demonstrate the ability to recover, learn from, and developmentally mature when confronted by chronic or crisis adversity. This definition of resilient leadership rests on a solid foundation of research-based principles and strategies to support leaders as they struggle to successfully overcome adversity" (Patterson et al., 2009, pp. 3-4).

**Experiences.** The rural school system offers some differing characteristics that urban school districts may not present that make for a more formidable leadership challenge from the superintendent's perspective. The rural superintendent has to cope with a larger proportion of the student body comprising of a lower socio-economic classification that a lot of other school superintendents do not manage. Another factor that rural superintendents are exposed to is the scarcity of resources. This forces the rural superintendent to preside over all operational activities for a school system. Arnold (2000) provided some insight of this characteristic as the author revealed the lack of a mid-management level required the superintendent to handle the brunt of all operational decisions, and some smaller superintendents will find themselves serving in multiple capacities that include but not limited to curriculum director, school principal, transportation director, and athletic director. Rural superintendents hold a high-profile job within their respective school communities that are comprised of relationships with stakeholders that are on a more intrinsic level than compared to a larger school system. "These factors combine to create a leadership work context that is difficult, especially with the current push toward higher academic standards and advanced formal learning" (Forner et al., 2012, p. 2). In order for rural superintendents to become resilient leaders that make a positive impact on their school district, they must commit to establishing goals that require district reform, strong relationships with the

school board and all community stakeholders, be able to manage constructive confrontation, and create resources that will require a vast amount of differentiated experiences.

R2 contributed that his life long career experiences as an administrator has helped him achieve success and establish himself as a resilient superintendent: *All experiences in my career, 23 years as a central office administrator and 9 years as a building level administrator is credited for all successes and the foundation that it has provided for my leadership resiliency.*

R11 reported how experience can teach you resiliency and how to handle controversial or difficult situations:

> *Typically, what it does when I'm faced with a controversial situation, it forces me to have to get up to speed. It forces me to have to become more aware of what the real issues are, and that's what I'm constantly having to tell our folks. They know typically they're not going to get a quick decision out of me. I'm going to make them wait, and I try to get them to do the same thing. Do not make a rash decision, take your time, so you know everything; it goes back to that information, that your gathering all the information. This can test your resiliency, but if you take your time and think the tough situation though, most of the times you will make the right decision. Controversial situations affect you emotionally, and you get tunnel vision. And that's the worst thing when you get tunnel vision in a tough situation. It can make it where you're not thinking clearly, where you're not seeing the big picture. I am having to constantly back up to the 30,000' view and see what is really going on here in this controversial situation. I'm the big picture person, and I am constantly trying to get people to back up and see the big picture, so it forces me to do the same thing. There is a temptation, when you get angry, when you're under personal assault, to narrow your view, to get angry, this comes with experience as you get older, you get burnt few times.*

R10 commented that the complexity of being a superintendent is the toughest job in the system that requires you have to be aware of all the moving pieces and power structures within the system to be successful:

*There are complicated things that we find ourselves in that has so many moving parts, that you got to really understand all those moving parts, to not get ambushed on the back side of it. The complexity of the job of superintendent is different than any other job in the school system. You got to be aware of where the power structure is in the city, how to work through those problems, and get everyone on your side and make them think it was their idea.*

R7 shares how his experience as a Marine helps him to make tough decisions as a leader and rely on your leadership resiliency:

*I go back to the days I was in the Marines. Again, a lot of times you want to make good quality decisions, but you can't over analyze it. Being resilient will aid in your ability to make tough decisions quickly. I have noticed a lot of administrators over the years, before they make decisions they want to pull out a policy manual book, want to talk to 85,000 people, they want to sit on it and think on it. When people want decisions they want it quickly; you go off your common sense, gut instinct lay of the law. You get to know what you're trying to accomplish. I think that challenging situations make a person a better administrator, a better decision maker, to a degree, I can also see how it can adversely affect you, it can adversely weigh on you because when there is not a quick fix, it does weigh on you. When you make tough decisions, and they are complex, I think it does make you better.*

R8 added:

*You know when you have to make tough decisions, I hope that it helps you. Because I look back at tough decisions I have to make, you do not forget about them…they are the things that you remember, and those are the thing that you learn from. Hopefully, those will assist you in being resilient and in the future, in making decisions.*

R1 focuses in on what needs to be done for the system to experience success through leadership resiliency: *I believe being able to make tough decisions and continue with what needs to be done is key in sustaining a healthy lifestyle while being a superintendent.*

**Being Positive.** A resilient leader is a leader that can demonstrate an optimistic positive out of a negative situation, and they maintain high expectations that something good can come from the adverse circumstances confronting them. R3 talked about how he feels that showing a positive attitude throughout negative situations is how resiliency facilitates his success:

> *Showing a positive attitude during adverse situations/circumstances, mentoring other leaders with this style in my district, continuing relationships with others that have experiences to lean on for advice, and relying on the resiliency that builds over time in my opinion, is how I am successful.*

R4 also reported that resiliency facilitates success through being positive in negative situations: *Resiliency facilitates my success by being able to make positive decisions our of negative situations. I have always been a "glass is half full" type of person. And you can't spend time in situations that you have no control over.*

R6 shared three points in how leadership resiliency facilitates his success as a superintendent: *I always begin and end with a positive, always maintain high expectations, and put myself in the other person's situation.*

McMahon (2006) stated that a relationship between flexibility, a belief that change is normal, an internal locus of control, and personal resilience. He also stated that leaders who develop a capacity to self-right during times of adversity are more likely to overcome obstacles and achieve success. A positive attitude during difficult times can simultaneously promote personal health and serve as a professional example to both colleagues and educational stakeholders alike (Farmer, 2010). Superintendents are forced to make tough decisions that will affect the future of employees, students, and have lasting effects on the school system. Resiliency is the ability to make these decisions through tough times, stick to sound principles,

learn through those experiences and maintain the focus of the school system. "Adversity provides educational leaders with the opportunity to model in context the very behaviors that they seek to develop in their subordinates. Obstacles can be made into educational objects that are used to demonstrate resilience and thereby allow the educational leader to earn authentic respect from organizational stakeholders" (Farmer, 2010, p. 3). Six superintendents (R1, R2, R5, R8, R9, R11) made comments through the interview process that exemplifies the model of resilience that is displayed by successful superintendents.

R8 states three points that can affect the success of a superintendent during tough times: *You cannot be successful in the role of superintendent without being resilient. Difficult decisions have to be made right or wrong. It's important to be able to bounce back in tough times.*

R1 added: *As a superintendent, you have to make tough decisions and be able to continue with what needs to be done.*

R5 simply believes that in order to be a successful superintendent that your resiliency has to be grounded on principles in your everyday life: *…following and living by a set of principles.*

R9 claims that trying to learn through all experiences helps to be more resilient: *I learn from negative experiences, as there is always something good or meaningful that comes from them which helps in developing resiliency.*

R11 is in the opinion that envisioning the outcomes of difficult situations will facilitate the success in being a resilient leader: *I believe that if you can see your way past a problem to the eventual outcome, you are more likely to become a successful, resilient leader.*

**Communication.** Communication is imperative for the success of a superintendent of education. When a superintendent embraces the skill set of becoming an effective communicator, the by-product is a positive influence on school culture, academic progress, and increasing the

capacity as a resilient leader. When communication produces mutual understandings, mutual influence, negotiation, openness, credibility, and trust, positive organizational development becomes probable (Toth, 2000). Superintendents that establish a consistent open line of communication can stay engaged with their school system and be an effective problem solver and build upon their leadership resiliency.

R7 embodies the essence of the importance of establishing communication to solve organizational issues while building a network of support. The following response was in the context of his opinion about how his level of leadership resiliency has facilitated his success as a superintendent.

> *I never quit any issue; I find solutions and motivate others by being a resilient leader. I have an open-door policy with an open line of communication with all. The staff and family support element that I have in place is very strong.*

Participant R11 revealed in his interview that a situation could force you to be selective in the information to give and to withhold. He also describes how he likes to include all actors in receiving information when dealing with a situation, and he finishes with his thoughts on how social media can cause problems while trying to deal with certain situations:

> *Sometimes you have to decide what you tell folks and what you do not tell folks. When I have a situation, I try to bring in the people closest to the controversy. I am bad about forgetting details, you might tell me some details today, and a month from now I might forget those details. If I've got a problem in a school, typically the first thing that I will do is to sit down with the principal. If there is something that I've heard about, he may not have heard about. Any kind of controversy, and kind of a situation, usually first place I am going is that principal. Because I feel like they are the closest to the situation, and they should be the most informed. But, sometimes they are not, sometimes I know more than they do. And you know, we both have to get up to speed. I like to talk to them; I like to get their perspective. I like to be aware of the big picture, all the people, all the actors that are involved. Is it parents, is it community folks, is it a problem with your staff, give*

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*me the whole picture. I guess it's my nature; I cannot help it, I am constantly stopping*
*them and saying, tell me that again. Because, I had to do that with kids when I would*
*grab them in the hall, because there would be so many angles with the story that I could*
*not keep up with it. But I think that's important if you're going to get the picture if you're*
*going to get the story down, you got to hear it and understand it. If you're lazy, and there*
*is a tendency to be lazy, you just kind of hear what you want to hear. You will make the*
*standard cookie cutter response. And that might be alright, it might get you by, and there*
*is a temptation to do that because sometimes there is minutia that you really do not want*
*to get into. But then sometimes, I am selective on what I want to know. Sometimes I tell*
*them, don't tell me I don't want to know. People are bad about coming to tell me what's*
*on Facebook. If a board member sends me something, I will look at it, but my people, I*
*don't want to know. I don't deal with social media to much. My people know that I don't*
*give it to much credence. I know it can become an issue, but you got to do your*
*homework, you have got to talk to your people.*

R11 also added how communication is important in dealing with changes within the

school district and building leadership resiliency with their building level administrators.

*You know, there is always going to be change, situations that come up that are stressful.*
*If I'm not in tune with what is going on in the school, I'm not going to have a clue how to*
*help them negotiate that. I try to keep an open line of communication with my*
*administrators. You know, my thing to them if there is something that rises to the level of*
*where you think it is going to involve me, or the board, let me know up front. Because the*
*principal is going to need help, he is always going to have to have a sounding board,*
*have somebody to talk to.  This not only aids in developing my resiliency, but it also helps*
*to develop their leadership resiliency through district leadership support in tough*
*situations.*

**Qualitative Support for Themes Developed from Interviews and Surveys**

In the role of being an educational leader, there are three key skill sets that are crucial for

a superintendent to project as a resilient leader. These three skill sets are resilient thinking skills,

capacity skills, and actions skills. In education, there is a consistent dynamic of adversity that

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will have to be dealt with at some level. This dynamic cannot be regulated in intensity, but the

superintendent does have the freedom to decide how they will think about the situation that faces

them in their leadership role. In order to make the best decision as an academic leader, the

superintendent has to gather various sources of information from several different levels in order

to fully understand the situation and make the best decision that will have a positive impact on

the school district. "Resilient leaders demonstrate an optimistic view about what is possible.

They strive to make something positive out of a negative situation, and they maintain high

expectations that something good can come from the adverse circumstances confronting them"

(Patterson et al., 2009, p. 9).

Patterson et al. (2009) stated that adversity is virtually inevitable. The option that occurs

is the way the superintendent decides to act on the adversity that is occurring in the school

district. How the superintendents decide to manage the situation is dictated by the level of

resilience capacity that the superintendent possesses. The capacity skills set that a superintendent

possesses determined by the experiences that are developed throughout their academic career.

Patterson et al. (2009) also states, that resilience capacity is elastic over time and through adverse

situations they build upon their success in dealing with adverse situations and expand their

capacity to weather future storms successfully.

In order for a superintendent to become successful, they have to be able to deal with

adverse situations and be able to endure, salvage and understand those complex positions. "A

leader can demonstrate satisfactory resilience thinking skills in the form of realistic appraisal

about what is happening now and what is possible in the future. The leader can draw from an

ample capacity of personal values, personal efficacy, personal well-being, and personal support.

But if the leader does not act on the courage of conviction, especially during difficult times, then

everything else is just talk" (Patterson et al., 2009, pp. 10-11). A successful superintendent can

display confidence in adverse situations and display action skills that are made up of

perseverance, adaptability, courage, and personal responsibility in the decision that are made

during these difficult decisions.

With each research question, there were various themes discovered that were categorized

under one of the three skill sets required of successful, resilient superintendents. (See Figure 2).

**Leader Resilience Skills**

| **Adversity Strikes** |
|---|

| **Skill Set: Thinking Skills** | **Skill Set: Capacity Skills** **Personal:** | **Skill Set: Action Skills** |
|---|---|---|
| Understanding Reality Envisioning Future Possibilities | Values Efficacy Spirituality Support Base Physical Well-Being Emotional Well-Being | Perseverance Adaptability Courage Personal Responsibility |

| **Successful Outcome** |
|---|

| **Increased Resilience Capacity for Future Adversity** Stronger Values Stronger Efficacy Stronger Support Base Stronger Well-Being |
|---|

*Figure 2.* Leader resilience skills. Adapted from "Resilient Leadership For Turbulent Times," by
Patterson et al., (2009).

**Quantitative Support for Themes Developed from Interviews and Surveys**

Overall the Leadership Resilience Profile survey indicates that superintendents in southeastern Alabama view themselves as having a high-moderate level of resiliency skill with a full-scale total average score of 38.2 across all subscales within the resilience strength score continuum. Superintendents report they believe they are resilient in the following subscale groups that reveal the mean subscale score and the standard deviation for that subscale in Table 2.

Table 2. Subscale Item Statistics

| Resilient Skill | Subscale | Mean | Std. Deviation | N |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Thinking Skills | Optimistic Future | 18.00 | 1.414 | 13 |
| Thinking Skills | Optimistic Present | 17.68 | 1.548 | 13 |
| Capacity Skills | Personal Values | 17.92 | 1.441 | 13 |
| Capacity Skills | Personal Efficacy | 17.23 | 1.423 | 13 |
| Capacity Skills | Support Base | 17.54 | 2.106 | 13 |
| Capacity Skills | Emotional Well Being | 16.69 | 2.359 | 13 |
| Capacity Skills | Physical Well Being | 15.15 | 2.154 | 13 |
| Action Skills | Decision Making | 17.69 | 1.548 | 13 |
| Action Skills | Personal Responsibility | 18.08 | 1.553 | 13 |
| Action Skills | Adaptation | 17.46 | 1.854 | 13 |
| Action Skills | Perseverance | 17.54 | 2.106 | 13 |

Item-level data from the study provided support for several items identified from the interview data. There were three themes derived from this study that were consistent with previous studies on leadership resiliency. Those three themes were: Thinking Skills, Capacity Skills, and Thinking Skills. Each theme is supported by various subscale groups that reveal the characteristics of a resilient leader. The subscale groups that were derived through this study

included: optimistic future, optimistic present, personal values, personal efficacy, support base, emotional well-being, physical well-being, decision making, personal responsibility, adaptability, and perseverance. Table 3 contains the tables of different themes and their supportive subscale groups. The tables report the items means and standard deviations across the subscale as a whole.

Table 3. *Descriptive Statistics*

| Theme | Mean | Std. Deviation | N |
|---|---|---|---|
| Thinking Skills | 17.8462 | 1.12518 | 13 |
| Capacity Skills | 16.9077 | 1.29516 | 13 |
| Action Skills | 17.6923 | 1.47956 | 13 |

The results from the LRP survey are based on a conversion scoring system. In accordance with participants' responses, each subscale is scored on a 5-point Likert scale. The highest possible score for each subscale is Five and the lowest being one. According to Patterson et al. (2009), the Leadership Resiliency Profile evaluates resilient strength for each subscale using the following scoring system: Low 11 - 21, Low- Moderate 22-32, High - Moderate 33-43, and High 44-55 for a total averaged score across all 44 questions.

**Resilient thinking skills.** The leadership resiliency begins with a leader that incorporates optimism in their thinking. In order for a leader to have the capacity to possess optimism, they have to be able to think about the current reality and the future. "The first step in the thinking process begins with how you think about reality. Resilient leaders want to understand, as comprehensively as possible, what is happening around them right now. They want to know the bad news and the good news. The second component of resilient thinking by leaders consist of how they envision future possibilities" (Patterson et al., 2009, p. 162). Even within the dynamics of adversity, an optimistic, resilient leader maintains a positive outlook of a dire situation. From the results as stated within the descriptive statistics of this study, optimistic future and optimistic

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present had a mean score of 17.8462 and a standard deviation of 1.12518, which scored within the high range of the resilience strength score continuum.

**Resilience capacity skills.** Within the superintendent's position, the one consistent dynamic that will happen is the onslaught of an adverse situation. The leader of the school district has a choice in how they will respond to the adverse situation. According to Patterson et al. (2009), a leader's resilience capacity is determined how strong the leader responds within an adverse situation. The resilient leader that experiences adversity grows their resilience capacity when they successfully navigate to a positive solution. Resilience Capacity Skills consist of the following subscale groups: personal values, personal efficacy, support base, emotional well-being, and physical well-being. The participants of this study scored a mean of 16.9077 with a standard deviation of 1.29516, which rated all the participants on average in the high-moderate range in the resilience strength score continuum.

**Resilience action skills.** The unique characteristics about this resilience leadership skill set are that it requires the leader to, "walk their talk"! It is all about the actions that a resilient leader takes that define their level of success. "A leader can demonstrate satisfactory resilience thinking skills in the form of realistic appraisal about what is happening now and what is possible in the future. The leader can draw from an ample capacity of personal values, personal efficacy, personal well-being, and personal support. However, if the leader does not act on the courage of convictions, especially during difficult times, then everything else is just talk" (Patterson et al., 2009, pp. 10-11). The resilience action skills within this study consisted of the following subscales: decision making, personal responsibility, adaptability, and perseverance. Within the resilience strength score continuum, participants of this study scored a mean score of 17.6923 with a standard deviation of 1.47956 on the subscales, which fell within the high range.

**Summary**

This chapter provided the findings from the SOLIA Survey, Resilience Strength Score Continuum from the Leadership Resilience Profile Survey, and in-depth face-to-face interview questions. The results were categorized into codes and themes from the various sources of data that was collected. The factors that influenced the resilient skills sets of rural superintendents aligned with data that was discovered in the three pieces of data that were collected from each superintendent. The only outlier that was discovered through research was from the face-to-face interviews, which revealed that some superintendents were elected into their position and some were appointed into their leadership position.

The SOLIA Survey provided data on general background information for each superintendent, factors that influence their decision to retire or not to retire and contained data from short answer questions regarding their leadership resiliency. The results of the survey were consistent with the face-to-face interviews on what made up each superintendents' leadership resiliency, what factors influenced superintendents to retire from their leadership position and what factors influenced superintendents to not retire from their leadership position, and how leadership resiliency has developed them into the leaders that they are today.

The participants of this research made comments through the interview process that exemplifies the model of resilience that is displayed by successful superintendents. Experiences throughout their careers played a big role in the development of the leadership resiliency that they reflect today in their leadership position. Six superintendents (R1, R2, R5, R8, R9, R11) made comments through the interview process that exemplifies the model of resilience that is displayed by successful superintendents. This finding confirms that leadership resiliency is the main characteristic of successful rural superintendents.

Most of the thirteen superintendents that participated in this research were board appointed superintendents. There were a few individuals that were elected superintendents, which are always thinking about campaigning for re-election to the point that it was the one factor that would cause the superintendent to leave their role earlier than what was originally planned. This would be a unique dynamic to focus on for further research.

The interview process revealed several factors that influenced leadership resiliency with rural superintendents. The common factors that influenced the superintendents to leave or stay in their position were the following: Job stress, negative health issues, issues with the family, career burnout, issues with their finances, feel unsupported, are not being effective on the job, bad board of education relationships, and loss of the elected superintendent position. Factors that would have the greatest influence not to retire were still being able to make a difference/job satisfaction; finances were in a good position, good health, love of the kids, and support from all stakeholders. The participants responses were very genuine and able to reveal insights on leadership resiliency from a rural superintendent's perspective that are based on past experiences which in turn established the following themes: positive relationship with the school board, established communication with the school board, establishing roles of the school board, supportive network, making decisions, envision future, and positive outlook. Through the research process, it was discovered that resiliency affects the success with rural superintendents in the context of past experiences, staying positive in all situations, and the importance of good communication.

**Chapter V: Conclusion**

This study sought to examine how thinking skills, capacity skills, and action skill sets required of rural superintendents affects their success in the context of leadership capabilities. The study explored the factors that influence leadership resiliency and the challenges that the administration faces in leadership roles with rural superintendents in Alabama. It is the hope of the researcher that the voices of the rural superintendents are heard as well as future research can be conducted to educate educational leaders about the challenges that affect the leadership resiliency with rural superintendents. The investigator also provided follow-up questions to the superintendents as part of gathering additional data for this study. This chapter presents a summary of the study and the important conclusions drawn from the data presented in Chapter 4. It provides a discussion on challenges that rural superintendents face as leaders and experiences that can reveal factors that can facilitate further research.

A descriptive case study approach was utilized for this research. Evidence was collected from multiple sources that included a SOLIA Survey, a Leadership Resilience Profile Survey, and in-depth face-to-face interviews with thirteen superintendents from various rural Southeast Alabama School Districts. Themes emerged from the data collection process, and that data was used to form the analysis that is in chapter four of this study. In chapter four, the researcher summarizes the key findings from the data, presents factors that influence leadership resiliency, and discusses the findings from the data that is analogous with the conceptual framework of this study, and presents possible ideas for future research.

**Overview of the Leadership Resiliency of Rural Superintendents**

School reform over the last several decades has made a profound impact on the roles and responsibilities of the school superintendents within the United States. Today the superintendent

must be able to perform the duties of a teacher-scholar, which will require the capacity to lead not only administrators but teachers in achieving academic goals set by the district. This requires a superintendent to provide a vision and mission that may demand the characteristics of a change agent to advance student academic achievement and student outcomes. Superintendents in the 21$^{st}$ Century must also serve in the capacity of a manager. The superintendent does serve as the CEO of a school district with the roles and responsibilities of managing facilities, fiscal operations, personnel issues, and school district budgets; while maintaining academic accountability, along with fiscal accountability and implementation of federal and state level mandates. With the multiple dynamic relationships that have to be maintained with school boards, local communities, and the department of education, the superintendent has to serve as a political leader. The level of success the superintendent has is based on the ability to vitalize these relationships to focus on the academic and business goals of the school district. In dealing with all of the previously mentioned entities, the school superintendent must also serve in a capacity that resembles a social scientist. This requires leadership that can use multiple forms of data and realize how that affect the school district and makes decisions based on this data that will improve the academic success of the school district. The single most important form of leadership that a superintendent must possess is being an effective communicator. This characteristic is mandatory for a successful superintendent to manage and accomplish educational reform goals while using vast amounts of data and working in the idiosyncrasies of collaboration. The differentiated roles of the superintendent require specific leadership practices and approaches. The rural superintendent faces different challenges in the context of leadership that is faced by urban or suburban superintendents. While faced with the same challenges of being a change agent for positive outcomes, the rural superintendent has the burden of dealing

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with a school district that may be defined by a high population of poverty and low economic resources, have to manage multiple responsibilities, and are more accessible to the local community compared to that of urban or suburban superintendents. Being the sole leader of education in a rural setting carries the sole responsibility for success or failure within the school system. In order for rural superintendents to be successful, they must possess a level of leadership resiliency that will carry them through difficult situations that can arise daily. Patterson et al. (2009) stated that in the toughest of times, educational leaders consistently demonstrate the ability to recover, learn from, and developmentally mature when confronted by chronic or crisis adversity. This definition of resilient leadership encompasses the thinking, capacity, and action skills that are required of a successful academic leader that struggles through adverse situations and produces growth with a positive outcome.

The dynamics of having the capacity to reflect resilient leadership as a rural superintendent included the following themes, which were a positive relationship with the school board, established communication with the school board, establishing roles of the school board, supportive network, making decisions, envision future, and maintaining a positive outlook. The common factors that influenced the superintendents to leave or stay in their position were the following: Job stress, negative health issues, issues with the family, career burnout, issues with their finances, feel unsupported, are not being effective on the job, bad board of education relationships, and loss of the elected superintendent position. Factors that would have the greatest influence not to retire were still being able to make a difference/job satisfaction; finances were in a good position, good health, love of the kids, and support from all stakeholders. The factors that contributed successful resiliency with rural superintendents were experiences, being positive, and communication skills.

The major findings from this study were the following areas: positive relationships with all stakeholders, networking/ support system, finances, job stress, experiences, communication, stakeholder roles, and being effective. A common theme that the majority of the participants related to was that a strong support system was vital to the rural superintendent's success and their capacity to develop strong leadership resiliency.  Rural superintendents must possess or develop interpersonal skills that are conducive to building strong stakeholder relationships. This is required for superintendents to develop support in decisions that affect the school district in the context of school policies. "Superintendents who lack the interpersonal skills to build constructive relationships with internal stakeholders may place themselves in an unfavorable light with school board members, and possibly position themselves for nonrenewal of their employment contracts or push-induced departures" (Tekniepe, 2015, p. 3). When a superintendent develops those relationships with stakeholders, they are making a long-term investment into the community and establishes interrelationships that make everyone involved to feel like a valued team member. This body of work looks at retention in the context of how it affects the capacity to develop leadership resiliency with rural superintendents.

The next discussion in this chapter will consider the distinct discoveries for each research question. It will also reveal how the data from the research is interrelated to the data from research that is located in chapter 2. Themes and codes were identified from the data of thirteen interviews which answered all three of the research questions.

**Question 1: How rural superintendents define their professional resiliency?** The 13 participants of this study all agreed that superintendent and school board relations were the most important aspect in defining their professional resiliency.  Throughout the face-to-face interviews, it became quite obvious that school board relations were important in the context of

their success as a superintendent and also the success of the school district. The superintendent

is the acting CEO of the school district. They perform multiple job duties throughout the day

that encompasses an immeasurable amount of responsibilities. These responsibilities include but

are not limited to managing transportation, curriculum director, testing coordinator, school

district finances, media liaison, communicator, and instructional leader. The other underlying

responsibility that goes along with the daily operations of the superintendent is that of board

intermediary. "The superintendent is responsible for keeping the board informed, making

recommendations regarding district operations, and setting the board agenda. It is interesting to

note that while the superintendent does participate in board meetings, it is in an advisory

capacity. Finally, the superintendent is responsible for enacting all mandates approved by the

school board" (Weiss et al., 2015, p. 5). In order for the superintendent-school board relationship

to work cohesively, each side must know, understand, and accept their roles in the school

district. This can become complicated due to changing roles of both the superintendent and the

school board, when both sides misuse the position, and the relationship becomes a power

struggle, and the community that requires positive leadership and academic success for their

school system. "While the relationship between the school board and superintendent is

sometimes described as strained and tumultuous, it is clear that this relationship is critical and

can be the driving force of a school district. An effective school board and superintendent

relationship are accomplished through continuous training, the involvement of community

stakeholders, commitment to self-assessment of goals and standards, and a strong focus on

student learning" (Weiss et al., 2015, p. 14).

The second dynamic that defined a superintendent's professional resiliency was the

importance of networking. It is imperative to the success of a rural superintendent that

relationships must be formed with students, parents, teachers, administrators, board members, and all key stakeholders within the community. Litchka et al. (2009) found that establishing administrative structures that are efficient and hiring administrative support personnel who work well together and have the skills to support central office functions, as well as establishing team approach, are qualities of an effective leader that can reduce the potential for work-related conflict and overload. The importance of having a network or support group is paramount for the superintendent to deal with occupational job stressors that may lead to an early retirement from their leadership position. Successful rural superintendents that project a team approach to their leadership style possesses effective problem-solving skills participate in stress-relieving activities and develops professional and social relationships with key community members to provide support. Lamkin (2006) conducted a study where rural superintendents also talked in detail about their relationships in the rural community, their visibility, and the importance of their involvement in the local community as a whole. This type of networking is critical in establishing positive relationships that will foster proportionate academic possibilities for all students, garner on-going support from the state department of education that establishes roles and responsibilities for the rural superintendent and school board, and established networks will provide the support that superintendents need from school boards which will foster success of the local school district through implementation and completion of changes within the district. "The significant responsibility of the school administrator in the rural setting is to build and cultivate the relationship between the school and community through communications" (Winand and Edlefson, 2008, p. 32).

The third common theme that defined professional resiliency among rural superintendents was decision-making skills. There is a plethora of difficult decisions that a

superintendent faces during the tenure of their leadership that can include organizational fraud, having to fire building level administrators, sexual harassment situations that not only involve adults but students as well, and dealing with a protest in the context of employee demotions or terminations. Rural school superintendents are entrusted to act in the conformity of the local rules and values that are held in high regard to the local community. In 2004, Langlois' study of complex decision-making by superintendents stated that in the case of complex problem situations, things could take on a different hue. In some situations, it can be difficult to justify one's actions according to organizational standards when they conflict with personal and professional values. The point here is that being the superintendent often requires a skill set that demands decisions to produce the best outcomes for student academic success and the best interest of the school system. The participants agreed that the best way to make difficult decisions was to gather as much information as you possibly can about the situation, seek counsel from experienced superintendents, and make the best decision that will hold up to the core values of the school system and community.

Question 2: The most important factors that influence a superintendent's decision to stay or leave their leadership role. The themes that were derived from the face-to-face interviews and the surveys about the factors that influenced a superintendent's decision to stay or leave their leadership role were job stressors, health issues, family issues, burnout, finances, board relations and support, no longer effective, loss of elections, emotional and physical well-being, and personal efficacy. The dynamic of an elected superintendent compared to an appointed superintendent will be addressed in a later section of this chapter. "The history of the superintendency suggests that the superintendent's roles and responsibilities are defined by emerging social, economic and political conditions, which in turn establish performance

expectations for schools and students that are aligned with perceived national needs and transformational efforts. In large measure, historical events have defined an American system of public education framed by federal, state and local community expectations. How these are structured, funded and governed and how the superintendent's roles are defined influences the trajectory of career patterns and issues faced" (Bjork et al. 2014, p. 17)

There is a multitude of occupational stressors that can alter the tenure of the rural superintendent. The superintendent's actions with daily job functions require them to pilot the proverbial ship, school district, through inclement situations that are influenced by occupational stressors that involve faculty, staff, key community stakeholders, financial limitations, and school board relations. Tekniepe (2015) eludes to this dynamic by stating that rural school districts play an integral role in the communities that they serve. Beyond providing students with the basic education and training that are important for securing an economic livelihood, rural school districts also provide economic support and serve as a cultural center in the community. The stress that these dynamics create can and has caused health issues with superintendents that can negatively affect their emotional and physical well-being. This dynamic either force them to change their daily eating and exercise habits or has forced them into an early departure from their leadership position. "Healthy coping mechanisms such as a balanced exercise program and a healthy diet can serve to reduce stress and increase health simultaneously. Conversely, unhealthy coping mechanisms such as overeating, alcohol or drug abuse, or negative attitudes can lead to negative outcomes, both personally and professionally. Such maladaptive outcomes can be avoided by proactive measures designed to develop resilience and overcome adversity" (Farmer, 2010, p. 2).

The roles and responsibilities of the rural superintendent overseeing district operations come with a caveat of short tenure in most cases that are influenced by outside factors. Through the researcher's findings, two of the most common factors that would cause a superintendent to retire early from education or leave their district leadership position would be family concerns and job burnout. The most important of the two factors being family concerns can be derived from various circumstances which family requires the full attention of the person serving as superintendent; thus, forcing a voluntary or involuntary turnover depending on which perspective that you take in the context of the importance of family and job responsibilities.

Through the course of the face-to-face interviews, the researcher discovered that all participants at some level agreed that school finances have the potential to be a factor that could limit the tenure in their leadership position and could be a factor that aided in their decision to stay in their current leadership position. The school superintendent has numerous fiscal responsibilities that have to be accounted for and are necessary for daily operations of the school district. According to Abshier et al. (2011) effective money management is vital to the success and survival of a school superintendent. This is evidence in indicator number five of the American Association of School Administrators Professional Standards for the superintendency, which requires that a superintendent should "exhibit an understanding of school finance including data management, budget creation, budget management, legal aspects of managing resources and problem-solving. It also is noted that rural superintendents may come under more stress compared to superintendents from larger urban districts due to tight fiscal restraints and resources to operate under. Another aspect of finances that could have the potential to affect turnover rates with rural superintendents is personal salary. The researcher did not find any

situation where a participant was unhappy with their salary. The one common thread with salary is that all of the participants would not mind making more money.

All of the participants that were interviewed stated that good board relations were critical in the length of tenure that superintendents serve. Another theme that coincided with this was the level of support from their board. It is crucial to the success of any superintendent to have the support from the board through a mutual working collaboration, communication, fair and democratic governance, and the board has to be responsible for maintaining a good relationship with the superintendent. "The relationship between the superintendent and the school board that supervises him or her is a central aspect of the superintendency. The school board is the superintendent's statutory employer and supervisor, and the two parties work together to create a policy for the school district" (Grissom & Andersen, 2012, p. 1154). When the harmony of this dynamic is disrupted through bad board relations that may be due to something as simple as knowing their roles in the superintendent/school board member relationship, the turnover rate of rural superintendents will be negatively affected.

The last two factors that can influence the superintendent's decision to leave or stay in their current leadership position was not being effective and the personal efficacy of the superintendent in stressful situations. Superintendents have a multitude of job responsibilities due to inadequacies in resources. "Absent middle management to share the administrative load, rural school leaders are involved in virtually every operational decision that takes place within their districts. In the smallest districts, the superintendent may serve as the curriculum director, school principal, transportation director and athletic director" (Forner et al., 2012). When superintendents feel that they are no longer effective in managing these responsibilities or lack the personal efficacy to manage stressful situations, then the next normal progression of their

leadership role would be to step down. It is important that superintendents learn how to cope with situations that can bring upon stress and the self-doubt that accompanies these stressful situations in order to further their tenure. "People who cope successfully with the demands of their work and personal lives tend to possess and utilize cognitive dispositions that promote effective problem solving, engage in activities that help to reduce stress, and pursue social relationships that provide supports" (Litchka et al., 2009). In short, rural superintendents that learn coping skills and improve personal efficacy have a better chance at increasing their tenure as superintendent of education.

Another factor that the researcher discovered while researching this study was the dynamics of how being an elected superintendent compared to an appointed superintendent influenced them in deciding to leave or stay in their current leadership position. These dynamic demands further research and will be touched again in the conclusion of this dissertation.

**Question 3: How resiliency affects the success of rural superintendents.** The participants in this study revealed in this study that the one factor that had a major influence on the amount of success that they experienced while developing their leadership resiliency was the experiences that they encountered throughout their careers. Rural superintendents' experiences differ from their more urban counterparts in education. The rural superintendent faces situations that are affected by the larger population of low socio-economic students that are enrolled in their school system, have to deal with limited resources, and serve in multiple leadership capacities compared to urban superintendents. "Small rural school districts across America are confronted with many issues. Concerns over inadequate finding and increased state and federal mandates, such as No Child Left Behind, continue to add to an already full administrative agenda. Therefore, superintendents/principals in small rural schools face the daily challenge of

meeting these demands and providing effective leadership" (Canales et al., 2008). In order to develop into a successful and resilient leader of a rural school system, district goals have to be thought out and planned while expecting roadblocks, there have to be good board member/superintendent relationships, and most importantly they have to be able to develop the necessary coping skills that will allow rural superintendents to see the big picture and not foster goal debilitating stressors that can halt the success of a school system due to poor leadership.

A resilient leader will develop the leadership characteristics to maintain a positive outlook on situations that seem to have a bleak ending. A resilient rural superintendent will avow high expectations even throughout troubled times. They also can work through difficult situations influenced by legislative mandates and budget restraints that require a resilient leader to stand on strong principles that form the very core of their being. In order for this to happen and maintain some level of success, the rural superintendent has to maintain a positive outlook on their district and work toward their district goals in the face of all the factors that could cause them to fail.

The resilient superintendent can only achieve success if they implement good communication skills through their leadership style. This requires a superintendent to become an effective problem solver, be more engaged within the school system, and increase leadership resiliency. "Communication skills have been recognized as essential for school superintendents from the position's inception" (Kowalski, 2005). Successful superintendents have to be able to communicate district goals, missions and visions of the district, be able to communicate with stakeholders within the communities of the school district, communicate with the teachers and students. According to Kowlaski (2005) the American Association of School Administrators has listed a standard on Communications and Community Relations. The standard states: The

superintendent will articulate district purpose and priorities to the community and mass media; request and respond to community feedback; demonstrate consensus building and conflict mediation; identify, track, and deal with issues; formulate and carry out plans for internal/external communication; exhibit an understanding of school districts as political systems by applying communication skills to strengthen community support; align constituencies in support of district priorities; build coalitions to gain financial and programmatic support; formulate democratic strategies for referenda; and relate political initiatives to the welfare of children. Based on this standard, it is evident that communication skills are essential for the success of resilient superintendents that preside over rural school districts.

**Discussion and Reflection on the Findings and Conceptual Framework**

The findings of this study focused on resiliency skill sets within the rural superintendents' leadership position and to determine if the original framework of this study aligns with the findings from this study or revise the framework if needed. The original framework utilized in this study is based on previous research by Patterson et al. (2009) and is around the ideals that even in the toughest of times, educational leaders consistently demonstrate the ability to recover, learn from, and developmentally mature when confronted by chronic or crisis adversity. This concept is founded on three broad skill sets that are required of a resilient leader: resilience thinking skills, capacity skills, and action skills. These skill sets were validated through the themes that were discovered in the research. Keeping a positive attitude during adverse circumstances was a theme that the researcher discovered that was consistent with all participants of this study. The participants of this study seem to hold to the same ideals that when situations arise, it is important to take in as much as information as possible and make decisions that are based on multiple sources of information so that they can draw on an accurate

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conclusion, which models the true essence of resilient thinking skills. This was validated within the statistical analysis that revealed a mean score of 17.8462 for resilience thinking skills, which placed the participants in the high range within the resilience strength score continuum. "Resilient leaders demonstrate an optimistic view about what is possible. They strive to make something positive out of a negative situation, and they maintain high expectations that something good can come from the adverse circumstances confronting them" (Patterson et al., 2009, p. 9).

Capacity skills presented multiple examples through the research that included job stress, health issues, burnout, finances, board relations, support, no longer being effective, emotional well-being, physical well-being, and having personal efficacy. Resilient capacity skills are developed over time through vast amounts of experiences with the superintendent position. As these situations arise and the superintendent works through them, they grow themselves as a resilient leader and increase their capacity skills. These examples are sub-categories that contribute to the growth in resilience capacity, which are personal efficacy, personal well-being, personal values, and a personal support base. These subscales made up the theme of resilience capacity skills where the participants had a mean score of 16.9077, which fell within the high-moderate range on the resilience strength score continuum. Patterson et al. (2009) discovered that large or small, chronic or crisis, adversity is virtually inevitable. How leaders choose to respond, however, is optional. This choice is determined in part by the skill set of resilience capacity. Think of resilience capacity as the fuel tank that supplies the necessary energy to produce resilient actions. The amount of fuel in the tank is what leaders depend on to get them through rough waters to safe harbor. At a given point in time, the boundaries of resilience capacity are somewhat defined by a leader's accumulated experiences.

When a resilient leader faces difficult circumstances and situations that cause occupational stressors, their capacity to comprehend the situation and grow while enduring distress at the moment and able to synthesize future possibilities through this thought process increase their resilient action skills. Subscale groups that were discovered in this research that pertain to the resilience action skills are decision making, personal responsibilities, adaptability, and perseverance. The participants scored a mean of 17.6923 on the resilience strength score continuum, which placed them within the high range for this theme. "The leader can draw from an ample capacity of personal values, personal efficacy, personal well-being, and personal support. But if the leader does not act on the courage of conviction, especially during difficult times, then everything else is just talk" (Patterson et al., 2009, pp. 10-11). Based on the statistical analysis from the Leadership Resilience Profile survey, superintendents in southeastern Alabama view themselves as having a high-moderate level of resiliency skill set with a full-scale total average score of 38.2 across all subscales within the resilience strength score continuum.

**Implications for Action**

This section addresses the issue of how rural superintendents build their leadership resiliency and how the capacity to develop resilient thinking skills, resilient capacity skills, and resilient action skills can affect the decision process of a superintendent leaving or staying in their leadership role, how rural superintendents define their professional resiliency, and how does resiliency hinder or facilitate their success.

The themes that were discovered in this research study should be shared with other rural superintendents, central office administrators, and building level administrators in rural school districts throughout this state. An important idea that is implied with this study is the need for other rural superintendents to employ the vast experiences that are revealed through this research

within their rural school districts. An idea would be to allow rural superintendents from their specific region to convene together and collaborate on ideas that build their leadership resilience.

The most considerable deterrent that came from a thorough review of the literature suggests that little attention has been focused on how rural superintendents in Alabama determine factors that influence leadership resiliency. This area needs to be studied to learn more about leadership resiliency with rural superintendents and to be able to educate future superintendents in Alabama about this topic.

**Consideration for Future Research**

From the findings and analysis of this research, one subtle theme caught the researcher's attention that could present a potential research opportunity. As the interviews were coded and the survey data was disseminated, the topic of how being an elected superintendent compared to an appointed superintendent affected their decision to leave or stay in their leadership position. According to the Alabama State Department of Education (2008), the state of Alabama houses 1,538 public schools that are located in 67 county school systems and 64 city school systems. About 98 percent of the city school superintendents are appointed, and the majority of the county school system superintendents are elected. It would be an interesting study in how leadership resiliency is developed and how it affects the tenure of elected superintendents compared to appointed superintendents in Alabama.

Other suggestions for future research are listed below:

- Replicate this study across a larger sample of participants.

- Further analyze how a superintendent's leadership resiliency is developed through established relationships.

- Perform a qualitative study over a larger scale in a multiple regression on how many years a rural superintendent compared to an urban superintendent will remain in their position and what are the differing factors that influence this decision.

- Replicate this study with a more diverse participant selection and how being a superintendent of color relates to leadership resiliency, tenure, and how the demographics of the school system compare to the superintendent.

**Closing Statement**

This study has identified how the capacity of leadership resiliency with rural superintendents define their professional resiliency; reveals the most important factors that influence a superintendent's decision to stay or leave their leadership role and reveals how resiliency hinders or facilitates their success. The rural superintendents in Southeast Alabama are dynamic leaders and are highly functioning under multiple job stressors that make for a challenging workplace. It is the researcher's wishes that this study is a sounding board and ignites future research on leadership resiliency with rural superintendents in southeast Alabama. Rural superintendents do a remarkable job in being fiscally responsible and stretching limited resources to provide tools for teachers that turn around and deliver a high-quality education to a student population that is mainly from low socio-economic families.

**Appendix A**

**Auburn University Institutional Review Board**

AUBURN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD for RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS
# RESEARCH PROTOCOL REVIEW FORM
## FULL BOARD or EXPEDITED

For information or help contact THE OFFICE OF RESEARCH COMPLIANCE (ORC), 115 Ramsay Hall, Auburn University
Phone: 334-844-5966    e-mail: IRBAdmin@auburn.edu   Web Address: http://www.auburn.edu/research/vpr/ohs/index.htm

Revised 2.1.2014    Submit completed form to IRBsubmit@auburn.edu or 115 Ramsay Hall, Auburn University 36849.

1. PROPOSED START DATE of STUDY: 8/12/2018

PROPOSED REVIEW CATEGORY (Check one):    ☐ FULL BOARD    ☑ EXPEDITED

SUBMISSION STATUS (Check one):    ☐ NEW    ☑ REVISIONS (to address IRB Review Comments)

2. PROJECT TITLE:

3. 
| Jason Hadden | PhD Candidate | EFLT | jeh0057@tigermail.auburn.edu |
|---|---|---|---|
| PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR | TITLE | DEPT | AU E-MAIL |
| PO Box 310052 Enterprise, Al 36331 | | 334-470-9008 | hadden@coffeecounty.ct2.al.us |
| MAILING ADDRESS | | PHONE | ALTERNATE E-MAIL |

4. FUNDING SUPPORT:  ☑ N/A  ☐ Internal  ☐ External Agency: _____    ☐ Pending ☐ Received

For federal funding, list agency and grant number (if available). N/A

5a. List any contractors, sub-contractors, other entities associated with this project:

N/A

b. List any other IRBs associated with this project (including Reviewed, Deferred, Determination, etc.):

N/A

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### PROTOCOL PACKET CHECKLIST

All protocols must include the following items:

☑ Research Protocol Review Form (All signatures included and all sections completed)
(Examples of appended documents are found on the OHSR website: http://www.auburn.edu/research/vpr/ohs/sample.htm)

☑ CITI Training Certificates for all Key Personnel.

☑ Consent Form or Information Letter and any Releases (audio, video or photo) that the participant will sign.

☑ Appendix A, "Reference List"

☑ Appendix B if e-mails, flyers, advertisements, generalized announcements or scripts, etc., are used to recruit participants.

☑ Appendix C if data collection sheets, surveys, tests, other recording instruments, interview scripts, etc. will be used for data collection. Be sure to attach them in the order in which they are listed in #13c.

☑ Appendix D if you will be using a debriefing form or include emergency plans/procedures and medical referral lists
(A referral list may be attached to the consent document).

☑ Appendix E if research is being conducted at sites other than Auburn University or in cooperation with other entities. A permission letter from the site / program director must be included indicating their cooperation or involvement in the project. NOTE: If the proposed research is a multi-site project, involving investigators or participants at other academic institutions, hospitals or private research organizations, a letter of IRB approval from each entity is required prior to initiating the project.

☑ Appendix F - Written evidence of acceptance by the host country if research is conducted outside the United States.

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### FOR ORC OFFICE USE ONLY

| DATE RECEIVED IN ORC: | _____ by _____ | PROTOCOL # |
|---|---|---|
| DATE OF IRB REVIEW: | _____ by _____ | APPROVAL C |
| DATE OF IRB APPROVAL: | _____ by _____ | INTERVAL FO |
| COMMENTS: | | |

The Auburn University Institutional Review Board has approved this Document for use from
08/10/2018   to   08/09/2019
Protocol #   18-192 EP 1808

# Appendix B

# Data Collection Instruments

# Data Collection Instruments

Leadership Resilience Profile (Revised) Scale LRP-R

Instructions: Respond to the statements below regarding your leadership behaviour using the 5-point scale.

* Required

| Question | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I have a positive influence in making things happen | | | | | |
| I expect that good things can come out of an adverse situation | | | | | |
| I focus my energy on the opportunities to rebound in a bad situation without down playing the importance of obstacles | | | | | |
| I demonstrate a overall strength of optimism in my leadership role | | | | | |
| I gather the necessary information from reliable sources about what is really happening relative to the adversity | | | | | |
| I seem to look for the positive aspects of adversity to balance the negative aspects | | | | | |
| I seem to accept the reality that adversity is both inevitable and many times occurs unexpectedly | | | | | |
| I possess the overall strength of understanding current reality in my leadership role | | | | | |
| I make value-driven decisions even in the face of strong opposing forces | | | | | |
| I am able to privately clarify | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| or publicly articulate my core values | | | | | |
| I rely on strongly-held moral or ethical principles to guide me through adversity | | | | | |
| I demonstrate an overall strength of being value-driven in my leadership role | | | | | |
| I have an overall sense of competence and confidence in my leadership role | | | | | |
| I take a deliberate step-by-step approach to overcome adversity | | | | | |
| I demonstrate the essential knowledge and skills to lead in tough times | | | | | |
| I maintain a confident presence as a leader in the midst of adversity | | | | | |
| I reach out to build trusting relationships with those who can provide support in tough times | | | | | |
| When adversity strikes, I try to learn from the experiences of others who faced similar circumstances | | | | | |
| I have a strong support base to help me through tough times in my leadership role | | | | | |
| I try to learn from role models who have a strong track record of demonstrating resilience | | | | | |
| I can emotionally accept those aspects of adversity that I can't influence in a positive way | | | | | |
| I demonstrate an understanding of my emotions during adversity and how these emotions affect my leadership performance | | | | | |
| I create time for replenishing my emotional energy | | | | | |
| I have the overall strength of | | | | | |

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| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| emotional well-being in my leadership role | | | | | |
| I demonstrate an overall strength of physical well-being in order to effectively carry out my leadership role | | | | | |
| I never let adverse circumstances that inevitably happen disrupt my long-term focus on maintaining a healthy life-style | | | | | |
| I monitor my personal health factors and then adjust my behavior accordingly | | | | | |
| I find healthy ways for channeling my physical energy to relieve stress | | | | | |
| I take prompt principled action on unexpected threats before they escalate out of control | | | | | |
| I take prompt decisive action in emergency situations that demand an immediate response | | | | | |
| I am able to make needed decisions if they run counter to respected advice by others | | | | | |
| I demonstrate an overall strength of making courageous decisions in my leadership role | | | | | |
| When I choose to take no leadership action in the face of adversity I accept personal accountability for this choice | | | | | |
| I accept accountability for the long-term organizational impact of any tough leadership decisions I make | | | | | |
| I have an overall strength of accepting personal responsibility for my leadership actions | | | | | |
| In my leadership role I acknowledge mistakes in | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| my judgement by accepting responsibility to avoid these mistakes in the future | | | | | |
| I adjust my expectations about what is possible based on the current situation | | | | | |
| I put my mistakes in perspective and move beyond them | | | | | |
| I change course as needed to adapt to changing circumstances | | | | | |
| I search for creative strategies to achieve positive results in a difficult situation | | | | | |
| refuse to give up in over coming adversity even when all realistic strategies have been exhausted | | | | | |
| I sustain a clearly focus on the most important priorities until I achieve successful results | | | | | |
| I demonstrate perseverance in my leadership role | | | | | |
| I never let distractions interfere with my focus on important goals and tasks | | | | | |

# Administration for the 21st Century:
# A Survey of Leadership in Alabama Superintendents
# (SOLIA – 2018)

## Part I: Background/General Data Information

Please check the appropriate blanks:

1. Gender: ☐ Male   ☐ Female

2. Age: ☐ under 40   ☐ 40-49   ☐ 50-59   ☐ 60-69   ☐ 70 or more

3. How do you describe your ethnicity?

□ African American
□ Asian American
□ European American/Caucasian
□ Hispanic or Latino
□ Native American
□ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
□ Other (Please specify) _____

4. Check the highest education level you have attained.

□ Earned bachelor's degree                       □ Graduate credit not toward a degree
□ Graduate credit toward a master's degree        □ Earned master's degree
□ Graduate credit toward a doctoral degree        □ Earned doctorate
□ Other (Please specify) _____

5. What percentage of your school system is certified to receive free or reduced-price lunch?
_____ %

6a. How long have you served as a superintendent in your current position?
_____ Years.

6b. Were you appointed or elected as the superintendent? _____

6c. What is the salary range of a superintendent for your system? _____

6d. How many total years have you been a superintendent? _____ Years.

7. Please indicate the position you held immediately before your current position. Before my current position, I served as a/an:
□ Superintendent                       □ Assistant or Associate Superintendent
□ Federal Programs Director            □ Special Education Coordinator
□ Transportation Director              □ Principal
□ Assistant Principal                  □ Counselor
□ Other (Please specify) _____

8. How long had you served in your previous position? _____ Years.

9. Did you serve in the previous position in your current system or another system?

□ Current System                       □ Another System

10. What is your highest level of certification?

□ "A" Certification of Equivalent       □ "AA" Certification or Equivalent
□ Other (Please specify) _____

11. In what year will you be eligible for retirement? _____

12. In what year do you plan to retire? _____


# Part II. To what degree will the following factors influence your decision

## to leave your current leadership role as superintendent?

| | Great Influence | | | → | | No or Little Influence | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| a. Obtain a position out of state and begin a second retirement plan | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| b. Burn out | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| c. Political conflicts in local community | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| d. Financial inadequacies and uncertainty in the district, making the job difficult to perform | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| e. Obtain another position in Alabama | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| f. Time requirements of the position | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| g. Need more time with family | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| h. Frustration with barriers and inability to accomplish goals | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| i. External mandates or requirements from national, state or other sources | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| j. Internal (district) mandates and requirements | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| k. Opposition from teacher's organizations (such as AEA, etc.) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| l. System politics or political stress | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| m. School board turn over | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| n. Accountability Pressures | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| o. Changing Student Demographics | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| p. Voluntary Turnover | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| q. Replaced by a better candidate | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| r. Age | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

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| | Great Influence | | | → | | No or Little Influence | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| s. Community Pressure | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| t. Single year contract | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| u. Unable to build leadership capacity and organizational capacity | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| m. Other factor(s) that influence my decision to retire as a superintendent (Please list) | | | | | | | |
| _____ | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| _____ | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

## To what degree will the following factors influence your decision to stay in your current leadership role as a superintendent?

| | Great Influence | | | → | | No or Little Influence | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| a. Continue to enjoy working as a superintendent at the current system | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| b. Feel supported by community and colleague(s) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| c. Finances | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| d. Still able to make a difference | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| e. Feel supported by family | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| f. Do not know what I am going to do after retirement | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| g. I hold an advanced degree which increased my salary. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| h. Promoted within ("Homegrown") | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| i. Possess strong communication skills | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

| | Great Influence | | | → | | No or Little Influence | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| j. Mentoring that I received in my leadership role | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| k. The development of my self-reflection skills | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| l. Because there is an established vision for the system | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| m. Because of my commitment to beliefs of the school system | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| n. My ability to Inspire Trust | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| o. Because of my work ethic | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| p. Because of my understanding of emotional intelligence | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 8 | 7 |
| q. My possession of healthy coping mechanisms | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| r. School Board's Willingness to Change | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| s. Other factor(s) that influence your decision to stay in the current leadership role as a superintendent (Please list) | | | | | | | |
| _____ | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 8 | 7 |
| _____ | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

## Part III : To what degree does each of the following descriptors reveal your state of awareness?

| | Great Influence | | | → | | No or Little Influence | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| a. I like to investigate things | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| b. I generate few novel ideas | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| c. I make many novel contributions | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

| | Great Influence | | | → | | No or Little Influence | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| d. I seldom notice what other people are up to | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| e. I avoid thought provoking conversations | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| f. I am very creative | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| g. I am very curious | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| h. I try to think of new ways of doing things | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| i. I am rarely aware of changes | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| j. I like to be challenged intellectually | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| k. I find it easy to create new and effective ideas | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| l. I am rarely alert to new developments | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| m. I like to figure out how things work | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| n. I am not an original thinker | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| _____ | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| _____ | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

## Part IV: Awareness

**Short Answer Questions:** Please respond to the following questions based on your experience in your current position.
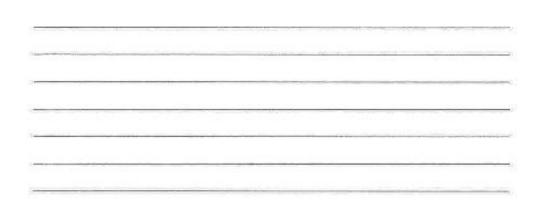
**Awareness** – the routine of deliberately observing your daily experiences with honesty and without bias. (Example: Personal opinions of academic progress of certain student demographics.)

1. Please indicate how your level of awareness facilitates your success.

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

2. How does your ability to self-regulate and manage your self-help you to adapt to changes of your current leadership role as a superintendent?
(Example: Managing fiscal issues that require increased operational cost on a decreased budget.)

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

3. How do your values and the school system's values drive your leadership role as the superintendent?

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

4. How do your expectations as the superintendent influence how you problem solve for the school district?

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

5. How do your emotions influence you in difficult situations as superintendent? Do you feel your emotions play a role in your decision-making process?

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

6. Other Comments:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

## Part V: Adaptability

**Short Answer Questions:** Please respond to the following questions based on your experience in your current position.

**Adaptability** – the ability to recover quickly from disruptions in normal job responsibilities due to stress caused by difficult situations. (Example: A parent has filed a lawsuit against the school system because their child has not being receiving special education services as stated in the IEP.)

1. Please indicate how your level of leadership adaptability facilitates your success?

   a. _____

   b. _____

   c. _____

2. What are the top five determining factors that could contribute to you leaving your current leadership role as superintendent?

   a. _____

   b. _____

   c. _____

3. What are the top five determining factors that could contribute to your decision to stay in your current leadership role as superintendent?

a._____

b._____

c._____

4. Please indicate the key factors that contribute to strong leadership adaptability.

a._____

b._____

c._____

5. Please indicate the three greatest challenges you faced as a superintendent.

a._____

b._____

c._____

6. Please indicate the three most important skills a new superintendent needs to be successful in the position.

a._____

b._____

c._____

7. How have you used negative learning experiences in order to grow as a school leader?

_____

_____

_____

8. Other comments:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Thank you for your participating in this survey!

Jason Hadden
Doctoral Student
Auburn University

**Rural Superintendent Interview Questions**
**Jason Hadden**
**Doctoral Student**
**Auburn University**

1. How has your past experiences prepared you for the leadership position you hold at the current time?

2. What is the one factor that would have the greatest influence on your decision to leave your current leadership position? Explain.

3. What is the one factor that would have the greatest influence on your decision to stay in your current leadership position? Explain.

5. How do you manage your time in order to have rest and recovery from leadership responsibilities within your school district?

6. What coping skills have you established to deal with difficult leadership decisions that may negatively affect individuals or groups of people?

7. What are some ways that you channel your physical energy to relieve stress from your professional responsibilities?

8. How does being aware of changes within the school district affect how you manage employees through stressful situations?

9. Does being challenged by a situation that requires a complex solution assist or impede your awareness as a leader? Explain.

10. How does your level of awareness affect your ability to be an effective problem solver?

11. Would you like to add any other comments to this interview?

## Follow Up Questions

Indicate your opinion about how important it is to have a collaborative working relationship with your school board.

What are some resources that you use to help you lead your school system and that helps to increase your leadership capacity?

How critical is a vision and mission for your school system and how do they influence your awareness and adaptability? Explain.

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