

SUPERINTENDENT LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS IN THE CONTEXT OF  
SCHOOL DISTRICT POWER STRUCTURES

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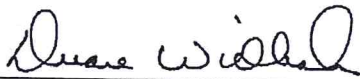
LEA PAIGE HICKERSON

2021

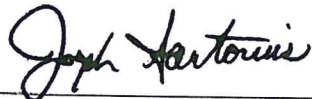
The undersigned, approved by the Department Chair of Graduate Studies in Education, have examined a dissertation entitled:

SCHOOL DISTRICT POWER STRUCTURES AND SUPERINTENDENT  
LEADERSHIP: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF MISSOURI SCHOOLS

Presented by Lea Paige Hickerson a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Education and hereby certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.



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SUPERINTENDENT LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS IN THE CONTEXT OF  
SCHOOL DISTRICT POWER STRUCTURES

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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
The Faculty of the Graduate Education Department  
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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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By

Lea Paige Hickerson, B.S., M.S.

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September 2021

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	ii
LIST OF TABLES .....	vii
ABSTRACT .....	ix
INTRODUCTION .....	1
Introduction .....	1
Theoretical Framework .....	2
Problem Statement.....	4
Purpose of the Study.....	5
Research Questions .....	6
Significance of the Study.....	6
Limitations.....	7
Delimitations .....	8
Assumptions .....	8
Design Controls .....	9
Definition of Key Terms .....	11
Summary.....	12
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE.....	14
Introduction .....	14
Theoretical Framework .....	15
Transformational and Transactional Leadership Theories .....	15
McCarty and Ramsey Power Structure Theory.....	16
Superintendent Functions .....	19
Leadership .....	19
Decision-Making .....	23
Power Distribution.....	24
Summary.....	26
School Board Functions .....	26
Leadership .....	26
Decision-Making .....	30
Power Distribution.....	36
Summary.....	40
Summary.....	40
METHODOLOGY .....	42

Introduction .....	42
Purpose of the Study.....	43
Research Questions .....	43
Participants .....	43
Selection and Sampling .....	43
Research Setting.....	45
Data Collection.....	46
Research Design Process.....	48
Triangulation .....	50
Pilot Study .....	52
Instrumentation.....	52
Interviews .....	54
Procedures .....	56
Data Analysis.....	57
Summary.....	59
<b>FINDINGS .....</b>	<b>60</b>
Introduction .....	60
Overview .....	61
Research Questions .....	62
Writing Results.....	63
Descriptive Information.....	63
Pilot Study .....	63
Survey.....	64
Interview.....	64
Participants .....	65
Data Analysis.....	68
Verification/Trustworthiness .....	69
Triangulation .....	69
Member Checking .....	70
Dominated .....	70
Theme 1: Decision-Making.....	70
Theme 2: Serving .....	72
Theme 3: Leading.....	73
Theme 4: Managing.....	74

Factional .....	75
Theme 1: Business.....	75
Theme 2: Decision-Making.....	76
Theme 3: Leadership .....	78
Sanctioning .....	79
Theme 1: Decision-Making.....	79
Theme 2: Managing.....	81
Theme 3: Vision/Mission .....	82
Status Congruent .....	84
Theme 1: Growth.....	84
Theme 2: Decision-Making.....	85
Theme 3: Managing.....	86
Theme 4: Leading.....	87
Research Question 1 .....	88
Power Structure: Dominated .....	89
Power Structure: Factional .....	93
Power Structure: Sanctioning.....	96
Power Structure: Status Congruent .....	101
Research Question 2 .....	106
Power Structure: Dominated .....	107
Power Structure: Factional .....	109
Power Structure: Sanctioning.....	112
Power Structure: Status Congruent .....	114
Research Question 3 .....	117
Power Structure: Dominated .....	118
Power Structure: Factional .....	120
Power Structure: Sanctioning.....	122
Power Structure: Status Congruent .....	125
Summary.....	128
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	130
Introduction .....	130
Results and Outcomes .....	131
Central Research Question .....	131
Research Question 1 .....	132

Research Question 2 .....	133
Research Question 3 .....	134
Discussion of Findings .....	134
Leadership Styles.....	140
Decision-Making .....	142
Power Structure Alignment .....	143
Outcome Expectations.....	144
Implications for Superintendents.....	146
Suggestions for Further Research.....	148
Conclusions .....	149
REFERENCES .....	151
APPENDIX A .....	166
Interview Protocol .....	166
APPENDIX B.....	170
Survey Tool .....	170
APPENDIX C.....	180
Letter of Permission to Use Survey Tool .....	180
APPENDIX D .....	181
Survey Tool Key.....	181
APPENDIX E.....	188
Code/Theme Triangulation.....	188

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 .....	68
Table 2 .....	71
Table 3 .....	73
Table 4 .....	74
Table 5 .....	75
Table 6 .....	76
Table 7 .....	78
Table 8 .....	79
Table 9 .....	81
Table 10 .....	82
Table 11 .....	84
Table 12 .....	85
Table 13 .....	86
Table 14 .....	87
Table 15 .....	88
Table 16 .....	93
Table 17 .....	96
Table 18 .....	101
Table 19 .....	106
Table 20 .....	109
Table 21 .....	112

Table 22 .....	114
Table 23 .....	117
Table 24 .....	120
Table 25 .....	122
Table 26 .....	125
Table 27 .....	128

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative narrative phenomenological study was to discover how the structure of power in a school district led Missouri superintendents' leadership styles and feelings of effectiveness in their roles as district leaders. There were four power structures (Dominated, Factional, Sanctioning, Status Congruent) used to categorize and analyze the school districts and their superintendents. There was one central research question that guided the study: How do superintendents feel about their leadership effectiveness in the context of district power structures? The gap this study aimed to fill was regarding school leadership effectiveness with consideration to transformational versus transactional leadership (Burns, 1978) within the frame of existent power structures in Missouri school districts. Considering the experiences and expertise of Missouri superintendents and aligning it with their self-described leadership successes and frustrations provided a scope through which to narrow the information and declare a most and least effective power structure for Missouri school leaders. This study established that ultimate power and autonomy do not make leaders feel most effective in their roles; leaders thrive in collaborative environments in which trust can be built and maintained through the course of time and with changes to internal and external stakeholders.

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### **Introduction**

There are 567 school districts in the state of Missouri, yielding 3,969 local school board members, according to Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE, 2019), and those elected public servants are trusted to coordinate and direct educational journeys for thousands of students. Through their collective power, students of all ages are either flourishing or languishing, which makes an examination of how school boards are functioning or failing important to the future of schools, superintendents, and the students they serve. The processes and procedures for boards in Missouri are defined by the Missouri School Boards' Association (MSBA), and they include: being a U.S. citizen, having a Graduate Education Diploma (GED) or equivalent, living in the district, being current on taxes, and being at least 24 years old (MSBA, 2020).

School boards govern as one body and are responsible for allocating funds; hiring and firing teachers, administrators, and other support staff; and setting the tone for the culture and the values of the school district (MSBA, 2020). The power to which school boards are entitled is what makes it essential to examine power structures and superintendent effectiveness; superintendents' leadership directly connects to how well students and stakeholders are served and the success of the educational process. One major facet of school board functionality is the power structure the boards—as well as the administrators—work within to create structure and shape schools through decision making. The structures within districts are often unintentional, shaped by beliefs and

agendas (Kenney, 2020), thus making this study important to assess and identify district power structures in relationship to the superintendent's leadership.

The work of McCarty and Ramsey (1971) examined four defined school board power structures—Dominated, Factional, Status Congruent, and Sanctioning—that helped mold the communities' and the superintendents' roles in the education process. These power structures are political configurations and dictate the flow of information, and they influence school districts' business models (Bjork, 2000). Many factors feed into decision-making, and one factor that must be considered is how transformational or transactional leaders fit within the confines or freedoms provided by the established power structures. The United States has grown to support transformational leadership through the efforts to create more inclusive and supportive learning environments (Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016). Transactional, or businesslike, leadership focuses on the structure of the organization and the work needed within, instead of the humanitarian scope (St. Thomas University, 2018). With information about how school districts function, there can be more focused and intentional training and leadership to assist districts on their journeys to support and cultivate superintendents who feel effective in their leadership roles. Chapter One provided an introduction, theoretical framework, purpose statement, significance of study, definitions of terms, delimitations, limitations, and an overview of the research required for the study.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The achievement and success of public school students is the purpose and guiding light for school districts nationwide, which makes it important to assess their leadership styles and professional processes regarding feelings of effectiveness, with the intention of

adding to the literature supporting school leadership. Burns' (1978) theory about transformational (people focused) and transactional (business focused) leadership was used as a conceptual framework for this study because superintendents' vital roles in districts and the power that drives districts' decision-making are important, and superintendents should have the tools in their wheelhouses to feel successful as leaders.

Decision-making and leadership are propelled by the flow or distribution of power that may be hierarchical or weblike in structure; there is not a definitive amount of power and rethinking the way it is transferred or transfixed is important when considering why the same patterns in decision-making and outcomes occur regularly and long term (Neumann, 2018; Xia et al., 2020). This qualitative narrative phenomenological study used the work and research of McCarty and Ramsey (1971) as the driving theoretical framework; their power structures were used to categorize districts before interviews were scheduled, which yielded a platform to compare school superintendents' feelings around school leadership effectiveness.

Each district included in this study was categorized into one of the four structures as defined by McCarty and Ramsey (1971): Dominated, Factional, Status Congruent, and Sanctioning. Boards identified as Dominated are so named because they adhere to community ideas and views; Factional boards represent key groups in the community and make decisions to meet those viewpoints; Status Congruent school boards are bound to one group that dictates much of what happens in the community, and they act as equals to community members; and Sanctioning school boards follow the lead of the superintendent and very rarely question those ideas (McCarty & Ramsey, 1971). Framing

Missouri school districts using power structures and examining transactional and transformational leaders bring a unique perspective to the current literature available.

### **Problem Statement**

Decision making is a pertinent function of school leaders (Oplatka, 2017). Poor choices in school district business can lead to poor money management, adverse personnel performance, and degradation of the schools' overall educational performance (Mulvey et al., 2018). Formal decisions are theoretically left to school boards (Adamson, 2018b), but the influencer or the power to sway those decisions is an important focus because schools need to better understand why their school superintendents are effective or ineffective in their roles, and they need perspective on how power distribution matters. This qualitative narrative phenomenological study provided the necessary elements to discuss effectiveness through the narrow scopes of leadership style and power structure, ignoring the other components, to provide a detailed and rich description to add to the available literature base for superintendents and school boards. The MSBA recommendations for school boards and superintendents, and they even require training to educate about the roles each plays, but the level of engagement is left up to local control (MSBA, 2020).

The recommendations for wielding boards' powers have grown after the development of school board associations, but school boards must be pushed to self-reflect and objectively recognize how they operate. This practice helps them to best present decisions to the community and to adequately make decisions that serve students; the alignment of board members' decisions, superintendents' power, and communities' needs is paramount for school success (Rocksund, 2017), but unfortunately there are no

definitive, well-established structures in place to balance and check the decision-making in districts (Flores, Alfinio, 2007). This makes the study of McCarty and Ramsey's (1971) Board Power Structures and the effectiveness of superintendents as district leaders useful because information about how the structure of power grounds decisions in Missouri schools is not included in current literature. Choices made by superintendents and school boards directly affect student success and learning (Heilgental, 2015), which creates a sense of need and urgency for schools to understand the depths of their reach because students depend on them to provide the education needed to succeed.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative narrative phenomenological study was to discover how the structure of power in a school district led Missouri superintendents' leadership styles and feelings of effectiveness in their roles as district leaders. The interviews conducted were systematic and narrowed by the conceptual and theoretical frameworks to yield the rich descriptions—as are essential in phenomenological studies (Groenewald, 2004)—necessary to address the research questions. The general definitions of McCarty and Ramsey's (1971) power structures are Factional (the most powerful community group gets the power), Sanctioning (the superintendent gets the power), Status Congruent (the board gets the power), and Dominated (the community leaders get the power), and the leadership styles were narrowed to transformational and transactional. Through these lenses, the gathered data were assessed to understand the social and emotional impacts of power that shape Missouri's public education system.

## **Research Questions**

Central Question: How do superintendents feel about their leadership effectiveness in the context of district power structures?

Research Question 1: How do Missouri superintendents approach leadership?

Research Question 2: How do Missouri superintendents approach decision-making?

Research Question 3: How do power distribution models alter or maintain superintendents' approaches?

## **Significance of the Study**

This phenomenological narrative qualitative study used an interview-based structure to determine how superintendents approach leadership and decision-making regarding transactional or transformational leadership theory. This information was paired with the results of the survey that aligned the districts with McCarty and Ramsey's (1971) defined power structures (Dominated, Factional, Status Congruent, Sanctioning). Examination of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks brings together two bodies of research that previously were extensively studied without consideration between them; there are sources that discuss the differences between leadership styles and the role they play in molding the face of a district. The problem is that the power structure is a factor in decision-making, generating a need to examine the concept together with transformation and transactional leadership to determine what yields feelings of effectiveness and adequacy among Missouri superintendents. The organization and alignment of this information add to the body of literature meant to help superintendents find or guide a district with a power structure that makes them feel successful as school

leaders. This qualitative narrative phenomenological study also added rich, focused information for reference by school boards or other school leaders for the intention of providing insight into what Missouri schools do that makes superintendents feel effective and find fulfillment in their jobs. Through the scope of this work, the literature will be enhanced by adding information that deepens understanding of how power structures make leaders feel empowered or held back and support their leadership styles.

### **Limitations**

Limitations exist in all studies and are identified as the components that are not controlled by the researcher but have the potential to negatively affect the research (Roberts, 2010). The limitations of this study were the following:

- Time the interviews took.
- Truth in superintendent's survey and interview responses.
- Access to superintendents and their school districts' data.
- Bias in superintendent responses to the survey and interview questions.
- Self-reported data and classifications may be unintentionally biased when reported by the superintendents.
- Consistency in interview responses varied due to the participants' personalities and preferences.
- Consistencies in interviews and analysis were based on participants' depths in answering.
- Access to superintendents was expanded due to use of video platform (ZOOM, Google Meets).

- Personal unintentional bias due to connection or lack thereof with the interview participants.
- Language used by the researcher and the participants had the potential not to mirror in meanings.
- Access to districts' documents was limited to and determined by the superintendent and the available district policies.

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations are the components by which the researcher narrowed the study for the purpose of focusing the information, thus creating a lens (Roberts, 2010). The delimitations of this study were the following:

- Using McCarty and Ramsey's (1971) four power structures for school boards (Dominated, Factional, Status Congruent, and Sanctioning).
- Interviewing two superintendents from each power structure (see Appendix A).
- Surveying only superintendents in Missouri.
- Using research questions as the focal point, as specified in Chapter One.
- Conducting interviews via a virtual platform (ZOOM or Google Meet), based on participant preference and health guidelines.

### **Assumptions**

The assumptions made for this study were the following:

- The surveys returned were answered honestly.
- The superintendents were honest in their interview responses.

- The information gathered and synthesized represents school districts in the state of Missouri.

### **Design Controls**

This qualitative phenomenological study was built upon the theory of McCarty and Ramsey (1971) that school boards operate within one of four defined power structures: Dominated, Factional, Status Congruent, or Sanctioning. The body of data was gleaned from focused interviews conducted with superintendents in the State of Missouri; this was important to study the responses and the nonverbal information to assess how they felt as school leaders. Before interview participants were chosen, surveys were sent to superintendents of Missouri public schools as a method for determining the districts' power structures. This was done because it was necessary to choose two superintendents from each power structure to interview about leadership effectiveness, thus providing a means for comparison. The surveys were sent multiple times, as needed, to yield as many responses as possible before moving forward. Interviews were conducted using open-ended questions to encourage the superintendents to discuss and explore their leadership effectiveness in an authentic way. Probes were used as needed to encourage participants to explain and detail their responses.

Controls are efforts made to counter the influence of the variables as defined in the limitations and delimitations (Gay et al., 2012). There was no control over which school superintendents returned the surveys to assess which of McCarty and Ramsey's (1971) power structures existed in the districts. The goal was to get responses from superintendents from various locations in the state of Missouri for the purpose of categorizing the schools into the four power structures, as previously defined. Missouri

was the focus of the study because it had not been done in the state. It was additionally necessary to assume the Missouri superintendents were truthful in their responses because their survey information was the starting point for the collection of interview data, and they had no incentives to misrepresent information about their districts' power structures or their own leadership effectiveness. Confidentiality was insured by assigning reference numbers to the school when information was reported. Confidentiality also provided the control for access to district documents and policies by making participants feel confident that the information would be used only for triangulation, and not for other judgements.

Once power structures were determined, two school superintendents from each power structure category were randomly chosen, using Randomizer.org, to be interviewed about their leadership styles and effectiveness. This was done to establish a relationship within the overarching themes and patterns between and among the four power structures. The interviews were transcribed, and themes were identified, as part of the data triangulation in relation to the research questions identified in Chapter One. Only two superintendents from each power faction (eight total) were interviewed because of the time constraints and the need for rich, accurate information connecting to the power structures and the leaderships styles required to support the explanation of the phenomenon (Groenewald, 2004). All eight interviews were conducted in person or using a virtual platform (i.e., ZOOM or Google Meet) to comply with the Covid-19 Pandemic guidelines and support participants' preferences. The platform was chosen based on the interview participants' comfort levels to remove one potential component of uncertainty from the process.

## Definition of Key Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions were considered relevant and true.

- **Transactional Leadership:** efforts to get results based on a give-and-take of power or resources (Burns, 1978).
- **Transformational Leadership:** Purposeful action to find meaning and value in struggles, and to better define leaders' conscience efforts to achieve goals for the district as a whole (Burns, 1978).
- **Leadership Effectiveness:** A specified figure serves the needs of stakeholders and the organization before self, and he/she does so while considering ethical, moral, and practical decision-making (Ciulla, 2012).
- **McCarty and Ramsey's Power Structures**
  - **Dominated:** School boards chosen because of their connections with powerful community groups because they will take advice from key community leaders and make decisions based on the ideologies and goals of the powerful people in the community. The superintendent is merely functionary (McCarty & Ramsey, 1971).
  - **Factional:** According to McCarty and Ramsey (1971), school board members represent one major group of the community and are only interested in voting to show their group's ideals and to move the district toward the group's vision. The group with power can shift, thus shifting district decision-making. The changes require the superintendent to shift to keep their position.

- Status Congruent: Boards that represent individual interests and have no overall power influence, which creates a hierarchy within the seven-member board, as opposed to a hierarchy that includes the community. The board members are always realigning with the voice of the moment, and the superintendent is the advisor to the board (McCarty & Ramsey, 1971).
- Sanctioning: Boards are inactive and have no ties to a philosophy or community mission. They follow the lead and direction of the superintendent absolutely (McCarty & Ramsey, 1971).

## **Summary**

Local school boards have been governing public schools for over 100 years to better serve the interests of their communities and the needs of students. This responsibility has led districts in various directions, some more positive than others, because of the dramatic differences in their communities (Race Forward, 2006) The variables in school business and the complexity of guidelines for effective school leadership have led to a need for examination of district decision-making to develop plans for schools' improvement (MSBA, 2020). Decision-making and expressions of power are complexities directly related to school superintendents' roles. Using the work of McCarty and Ramsey (1971) regarding power structures in conjunction with Burns' (1978) work around transactional and transformational leadership, information around how power flow made Missouri superintendents feel in their leadership roles was provided, thus filling a gap in the literature. The available literature did not provide information regarding successful leadership within the confines of existing power

structures, nor did it address how power may encourage either transformational or transactional leadership within the district. The purpose of this qualitative narrative phenomenological study was to discover how the structure of power in a school district led Missouri superintendents' leadership styles and feelings of effectiveness in their roles as district leaders. At this stage in the research, the power structures were generally defined as Factional (the most powerful community group gets the power), Sanctioning (the superintendent gets the power), Status Congruent (the board gets the power), and Dominated (the community leaders get the power), and the leadership styles were narrowed and focused on transformational and transactional.

In Chapter Two, the Review of Related Literature was explained and explored thematically, and it examined the existing information and learning around superintendents' and school boards' roles, as well as presented how power and leadership pair with their well-established jobs. Chapter Three explored the methodology for ascertaining information to describe and inform the phenomenon of the study, including tools and data assessment used. Chapter Four provided an overview of the information gathered in the interview processes, and the conclusions drawn from the interviews and triangulation were presented in Chapter Five, along with recommendations for further research.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

#### **Introduction**

In 1893, the first local school boards were established in the United States in response to concerns about the gap between the state school boards and the rules and regulations being put in place for farming communities. Since the benchmark decision to create local control of public schools, school boards have been the governing bodies dictating much of what schools do with ever-changing climates to inform their decisions. School boards make choices to direct the business and set the educational paths for districts (Race Forward, 2006).

As McCarty and Ramsey (1971) asserted 4 decades ago, school boards use power structures in their decision making, so it is vital for schools and organizations to evaluate and learn about the structures to better serve current and future students on their educational journeys in the ever-changing global society. After McCarty and Ramsey studied and defined power and leadership hierarchies, the concepts of transformational and transactional leadership were introduced by Burns (1978); thereafter, the goals and jobs of school leaders took on new aspects and expectations. The available literature made clear what the roles of the school board and the superintendent are as of 2021, and it made clear power and decision-making affects school districts from central office down to the classroom level. The literature fails, however, to explain how power and leadership effectiveness pair together, and it does not provide information about how power relates to feelings of leadership effectiveness to support long-term superintendent placement.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### ***Transformational and Transactional Leadership Theories***

Being a 21<sup>st</sup>-century leader is not simple because there are many schools of thought and just as many theories to shape the leadership role; examination of transformational and transaction leadership was a lens through which the questioning was focused for this study. Transformational leadership theory focuses on supporting the interests of the group, as a whole, with the goal of positive change for the district. A superintendent who uses transformational leadership is often considered inspirational through their investment in the people, and with less focus on the speed of the process; they want to get others to invest and feel motivated to make the changes necessary (Steinmann et al., 2018), and they want others to rise to a higher level of professional potential (Freeborough & Patterson, 2015). This theory originated with Burns in 1978 and was built upon by Bass in 1985, with a focus on purposeful action bringing the leaders to find meaning and value in their efforts, and to better define their conscience efforts to achieve district goals. Bass stated that transformational leaders inspired people to follow; thereby generating a shared vision. Bass determined that transformational leaders were better for institutions with turbulence, and they instill satisfaction in their subordinates. Transformational leadership has become the preferred style in the United States because transformational leaders are creative, inspirational, caring, and goal oriented (Freeborough & Patterson, 2015; Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016).

In contrast, Transactional leadership was defined by Burns (1978) as efforts to get results based on a give-and-take of power or resources, much as politicians do.

Transactional leaders are often respected, but not necessarily loved, for the efforts they

exert to get results and run the business of the school; however, they are not touted as leaders who think caring alone will inspire others to make efforts towards changing and innovating to achieve better (St. Thomas University, 2018). Bass (1990) recognized that transactional leaders were more appropriate for stable organizations, and they are leaders who give to get, which can lead to bargaining, but as Burns (1978) specified, they are also honest, fair, and responsible; they always meet their commitments. Yahaya and Ebrahim (2016) stated transactional leaders are invested in methods of assessing what is needed to leverage others in the direction necessary to meet the goals and the mission; they are specific in stating this does not mean the leader does not care, it means they are more results oriented.

### ***McCarty and Ramsey Power Structure Theory***

Leaders either find success or failure in the school systems, and the line of fortune often revolves around the district culture and the expectations for the leader. The work of McCarty and Ramsey (1971) around the power structures in school districts and how they affect the roles of school boards, the community, and the superintendent was the primary lens for this study. The four structures as named by McCarty and Ramsey are Dominated, Factional, Status Congruent, and Sanctioning. McCarty and Ramsey determined the power structure a school district adopts—intentionally or unintentionally—is related to the depth of the superintendent’s role and the brevity for the community’s function in the district’s business.

McCarty and Ramsey (1971) defined a school board exhibiting a Dominated power structure as having ideals and modalities in alignment with a dominant group in the community, and decision-making is most often lead by a few powerful or elite

members who drive the school district in the direction of the groups they represent. This is not always a conscious effort made by the school board. School boards with Dominated power structures are directly linked to communities that value and support a Dominated power structure because the powerful community members often influence the city council and mayoral races, not just school board elections. With dominance at the community and school board levels, there is little power left for the superintendent to exercise. When the board exhibits a Dominated Power Structure, the superintendent is merely functionary, meaning he or she implements policy and solves day-to-day issues arising in between meetings, but does not influence change in the district (McCarty & Ramsey, 1971).

Superintendents' roles in districts are important, and their engagement in the communication and power creates shifts in influence, possibly leading to strain; the severity and longevity of the negativity are dependent upon the strength before the shift (Tekniepe, 2015; Webner et al., 2017). The influence of a superintendent in a district with a Factional school board is narrow because a small interest group or political group in the town has created a power structure based on making changes that meet the morals and beliefs of the small subgroup. This means the next election could bring about shifts in district goals, missions, and visions (Bjork, 2000; McCarty & Ramsey, 1971). This making it necessary for the superintendent to work with and support the new majority if he or she wants to maintain their position with the district (McCarty & Ramsey, 1971).

Familiarity with the inner workings of the education system, the underpinnings of the curriculum mandates, and Missouri State Improvement Plan goals are paramount for superintendents who are hired to function with a school board following a Status

Congruent Power Structure because that structure requires the superintendent to act as a professional advisor for district business to progress forward. The school board is not bound to one group or idea and often views the superintendent as an equal or a partner in the decision-making process because of the constant shift in community power and focus (Hoyle et al., 2005; McCarty & Ramsey, 1971). This power structure provides a balanced relationship between the school board and the superintendent. School boards that delegate authority to and honor expertise of their superintendents demonstrate a primary indicator of successful school boards and healthy relationships; they typically make decisions that lead to internal stakeholders thriving, not just existing, in the school buildings (Rocksund, 2017).

The delegation of complete authority and the freedom to make unhindered decisions is not the intended role of a superintendent and it renders the school board obsolete (Hoyle et al., 2005). The school board's unwillingness or inability to make decisions is what happens within a Sanctioning Power structured district. This can be viewed as an absence of power for school boards. Board members depend solely on the superintendent to make choices and direct the business, they do not question the superintendent, and they do not uphold or support the communities' values (McCarty & Ramsey, 1971). This can lead to degradation and lack of trust in the school district because community members feel completely disconnected from decisions approved by the school board. Reliance on the superintendent is best when school leaders and educators stay in roles long-term and provide continuity for the district, but it was discovered superintendent tenure and teacher retention lead to better test scores and more stable finances for the district (Colby-Rooney, 2013; Metzger, 1997). D. Rice et al.

(2000) discovered the least functional school boards depend on their superintendent to educate and inform them about the scores and measures needed to make decisions, as is described in districts with Sanctioning Power Structures (McCarty & Ramsey, 1971).

### **Superintendent Functions**

Initially, in the 1800s, school boards directed all business and day-to-day decisions in school districts, but the increasing need and responsibilities grew beyond what the volunteer board members could provide, so superintendents were hired and made commonplace by the 1920s in American educational systems (Maeroff, 2010). It became the role of the superintendent to lead and introduce structure and order to the business of the school and the board meetings because district leaders' conduct can have a positive or negative influence, and it was important to have a mediator for the board members (Weiler, 2015). In recent educational movements, such as No Child Left Behind and Every Student Succeeds Act, superintendents' roles were morphed into being curriculum or educational visionaries, and not just figureheads taking care of day-to-day business, thereby, creating a shift from generally transactional to generally transformational (Bjork et al., 2018; Przybylski et al., 2018). Leadership, decision-making, and power distribution are the themes by which the role of superintendent was divided.

### ***Leadership***

Pushing current superintendents towards transformational paradigms was the work of Bass and Riggio (2006) and Day et al. (2016), who conducted independent studies a decade apart and found transformational leaders have positive influences on districts because they push other school leaders and faculty to strive for goals and get

results. In Freeborough's (2015) study, it was determined that while transformational leaders were overall well-regarded, age mattered when considering their effectiveness; older generations did not appreciate the lack of structure often accompanied by transformational leaders, so it was important to determine what the community's expectations were. The literature did not include specifics about how the power structure related to transformational versus transactional leadership styles.

The shift in superintendents' roles and responsibilities generated a need to examine different aspects of the job to make them more successful leaders for their districts, and in doing so Johnson, (2007) established a disparity between people claiming they wanted a transformational leader, but in fact their actions and responses indicated they wanted a transactional leader; this division leads to an average tenure of 3.5 years for superintendents included in his study. Through this scope, Velez's (2020) study determined mentoring programs for superintendents helped them feel more successful because they got a group of like professionals for support and consultation, which grew their skill sets. Through the work of Hamilton (2020), it was discovered 62% of superintendents had never consulted other superintendents to collaborate; however, 73% would be willing to participate if a program were established for them. School superintendents get swept into the politics of the community at times, such as in McCarty and Ramsey's (1971) Factional Power Structure, but the intention of creating a school-governing system apart from governmental bodies was to depoliticize school business in hopes of remaining focused on education, and nothing more (Hill & Jochim, 2018). The dynamic, sometimes conflicting, roles that are demanded of current school leaders

generated necessities for superintendents to engage in national and state-level organizations to provide them with support and protections (Hill & Jochim, 2018).

Bjork et al. (2018) suggested the role of superintendent cannot be pigeonholed into transactional or transformational; they suggested superintendents must have the capacity to be both, no matter their natures, because the job is not as simple as it was when those labels were defined by Burns in 1978. The literature established through effective communication skills and with sharpened social behavioral recognitions skills, superintendents can learn to register shift and find a successful niche by letting their own philosophies guide them. It is not clear how superintendents' personal philosophies do not overtake or make them lean into one style of leadership, based on district structures (Ford & Ihrke, 2015). District-level school leaders must practice smart delegation, assuming the district has a Sanctioning Power Structure (McCarty & Ramsey, 1971), and keep up with current information and trends to stay effective in their roles; superintendents can find success only when commitment to the goal/vision is made and adept teams are developed to reach the goal, as concluded by Bjork et al. (2018). In a Allen's 2017 study including Kentucky school districts, there was not a statistically relevant connection between transformational leadership and effectiveness in the school district; it was further determined superintendents needed to reflect on and understand their responsibilities and the needs of the district, then determine if they could meet those needs within the realm of their leadership capacities. Part of the assessment is in knowing the district's vision, which must be established by the school board and should be included in the hiring process for the superintendent to increase chances for success (Curry et al., 2018; A. Rice, 2017). A. Rice (2017) also determined the superintendent

must value the vision and the board members' experiences to allow for higher order communication. When listening to the school board and hearing their points of view, the superintendent must have respect and open-mindedness to continue the work (Oplatka, 2017; A. Rice, 2017).

Wilhite et al. (2018) studied and defined 12 specific competencies superintendents must have to find success in the field. Ranking above the others was a skill for communication and collaboration because they discovered superintendents could overcome the other job demands, creating a true professional learning community, with their skilled use (Velez, 2020; Wilhite et al., 2018); Professional Learning Communities have become a prominent and essential tool for leadership to focus on learning and results, while expanding their community of trust (Dufour et al., 2005). Twenty-first-century culture supported more collaboration and open communication among school leaders, teachers, and students, which has since led to innovative leadership because leaders are not performing tasks in vacuums (Wilhite et al., 2018). The literature does not address how leadership dynamics coincide with school board power or stakeholder influence outside of the school system. Innovation and boldness are only made possible when enough trust and power are given to allow the superintendent to move the district in an identifiable direction (Wilhite et al., 2018; Xia et al., 2020).

Trust is essential for successful student leaders, but as Bjork and Keedy (2006) established in their study, if superintendents are going to maintain tenure, they will need to morph and adhere to the political polarization experienced in districts because they cannot be rigid when the board morphs and takes a new direction. This change is required in all of McCarty and Ramsey's (1971) power structures—except Sanctioning—because

the power resides with the community or with the board in a form, so changes in the platform will not support a superintendent determined to be static in their practice. The Political Frame, as introduced by Bolman and Deal (2017), can be a platform for coercion, if leaders do not make a conscience effort to create strategy and consult the HR Frame to provide balance through caring about the people, not just the process.

### ***Decision-Making***

When decision-making is shared, and when head administrators are given more autonomy, the culture becomes more professional and creative—supporting transformational leaders (Curry et al., 2018). Shapiro and Stefkovich (2016) pointed out superintendents needed to know when to omit stakeholders and when to include them because otherwise the school business becomes complicated and slower than is appropriate or helpful. In the processes of omission or inclusion, it must be recognized which stakeholders are most influenced by the choices, which makes the study of power structures and leadership effectiveness important. This concept was not found in the available literature.

Wehrkamp (2020) studied the importance of stakeholders in superintendents' decision-making and determined not all stakeholders can be lumped together; there are ancillary (outside of the school district) and primary (inside of the school district) stakeholders who must be accurately categorized and respected. Even if superintendents change their positions to meet the ideologies and politics of a changing school board or a shift in community power, they may face mistrust among the internal stakeholders (students, teachers, principals) because they may see it as a lack of consistency (Maranto et al., 2017). Superintendents who recognized students as primary stakeholders and

heard them, along with faculty and staff, had better success in making positive changes in their districts, leading one to understand the importance of community but recognizing community is not the most important (Wehrkamp, 2020). Virtue is essential for school superintendents because there are many unclear and difficult choices they must make, so they need virtuosity to find balance among the stakeholders and make decisions to support the vision and the mission of the district, and still adhere to expectations from the school board (Oplatka, 2017). These findings support Sanctioning Power Structures, and directly contradict Dominated and Factional Power Structures (McCarty & Ramsey, 1971).

### ***Power Distribution***

As found in Hill and Jochim's (2018) study superintendents cannot accomplish much alone; they are no longer regarded as the kings of schools, so it is important for superintendents to understand how to work within the structure of the school or when to leave in favor of a district that does support their personal philosophies (Hill & Jochim, 2018; Przybylski et al., 2018). The superintendents in Hill and Jochim's study reported finding themselves driven to pander to or bargain with influential groups or people within the community structure, again agreeing with McCarty and Ramsey's (1971) vision for a Factional, perhaps Dominated, Power Structure. In Johnson's (2007) study, he found superintendents were most often regarded as advisors. These efforts may keep superintendents in jobs, but there is not real information about how effective this makes them as a leader or how successful this makes the district. Bryk et al. (2015) reported that playing politics should not be confused with hearing and respecting stakeholders; they differentiated and explained successful administrators and districts use "network

improvement communities” (p. 77) to problem solve and make decisions, but community members are not in power. The line is fine, but the distinction is important when considering truly where power emanates, and as Oplatka (2017) established, school leadership is about relationship building with all stakeholders to help them understand their roles through clear and consistent communication.

Superintendents’ powers in decision-making and autonomy was a focal point in a study conducted by Xia et al. (2020), and they determined the power had little to do with the superintendents’ abilities or educational levels, but more to do with functions and routines developed by the district, apart from the superintendent; at times, the distribution of power was set so long ago that no current employee could provide a source or start. Power in their study was about the relationship and the push and pull occurring in the face of major decisions. Xia et al. established having resources is not power and doing is not power; there must be coupling intent for real progress and power to be flexed, so they recommended superintendents work with their boards as advisors and invest personally in decision-making, thus upholding the compatibility of Status Congruent Power Structures (McCarty & Ramsey, 1971) and transformational leadership (Burns, 1978). This type of work builds trust, which is a major component to the superintendent’s job because without trust front above and below, inaction will be the result because stakeholders will not be willing to follow any kind of plan for change—good or bad (Khalifa et al., 2015; Smylie et al., 2016). The literature does not address what specific power flow generates superintendent effectiveness in the district and with the board.

## ***Summary***

School superintendents are held to different standards than were set for them in the 1920s, and through the scope of the change, school boards had to find new footing or fight to keep the old ways. School boards are still the guardians of the districts (Race Forward, 2006); therefore, the leadership, decision-making, and power that superintendents exercise are dependent upon the boards.

## **School Board Functions**

Historically school boards have been policy, management, and financial control entities (Kirst, 2008), but with time comes change, and in the 21<sup>st</sup> century those boards' capacities to evolve and adapt with the ever-changing role of school leaders are paramount (Curry et al., 2018). Leadership, decision-making, and power distribution were the themes used to focus school boards' varied roles.

## ***Leadership***

School board leadership connects the governmental agencies to the superintendent and building-level leaders; therefore, if that link is comprised of individuals who seek stasis, instead of innovation, there may be many difficulties faced by the superintendent when trying to drive a district to success (Kenney, 2020). Hamilton (2020) examined the school boards' relationships with and public support of superintendents; he discovered a weak relationship between them led to superintendents' low morale and high turnover, but it also made stakeholders in the school and community see school governance as weak. Hamilton's conclusion agreed with the findings of Thompson (2014) and Tekniepe (2015). Some of this is due to the changes of those serving on the board and their dislike or distrust of the superintendent's philosophies as the benefactor leader carrying out the

interests and goals of the district (Grissom & Andersen, 2012). When districts have staff turnover, no matter the reason, there is a setback in student achievement because of the time required for new staff learning the ways of the institution, which negatively affects students' achievement and community confidence in the district (Bridges et al., 2019).

Taking the time to plan and understand the demands of their new role is an essential step for successful board members and effective superintendents. As established by Wilhite et al. (2018), among the highest priority issues driving superintendents out is a lack of understanding of all the facets the job requires. There are also monetary costs to the districts for professional development and materials needed to support the new additions (Billingsly, 2019). After decades of democracy and a century of structured public education, researchers are just beginning to understand how those concepts meld together successfully and how the training and professional organizations matter in the scope of school board performance, superintendent retention, and student achievement (Ford & Ihrke, 2017). It is essential for school boards to invest in themselves because the development of a school board has a direct and dramatic connection to the retention of staff, including superintendents (Flores, Alexandro, 2017; Ford & Ihrke, 2017). Turnover does not just apply to the superintendents who leave because of the board, but to the school board itself because the term of a school board member is either two or three years, depending on the parameters set by the district guidelines. Such a change can lead to big shifts in the goals and mission for the district if the board operates within a Factional Power Structure (McCarty & Ramsey, 1971).

School boards and school administrators must be assessed and held accountable to improve their actions and develop themselves as a powerful system serving students and

communities. The Pew Charitable Trusts (2016) conducted a study of all 50 states that examined the processes and procedures for identifying districts in distress, and then determined what to do with those districts to give them success. In the Pew study, they found 22 states had monitoring systems in place, and eight of those states had early warning systems to help districts before the situations became dire. Missouri does not have a monitoring system in place, nor is there an intervention program outlined. Missouri does report fund balances falling below 3%, and they do have the authority to take over the distressed district (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2016). This process is reactive rather than proactive. These factors in conjunction with school board fund management are what have made the importance of school board training come to the forefront of consideration for the state- and national-level school board associations (Mulvey et al., 2018; Schneider et al., 2017).

With the increase in school board member role complexity, board members have been challenged to find meaningful connections to the school through relationship building and attendance at events, other than through the scope and reach of board meetings, to build self-efficacy and be effective as school governors (Polk, 2017). Only through accountability and common goal setting will public accountability and parent involvement see a rise because, as the link, the school board members dictate much of the taxpayers' tone and reaction to the school district because they direct the dialogue around the school business and its successes or failures (Bridges et al., 2019). In a report by Alsbury and Gore (2015), it was clear among stakeholders and political figures, school boards are the least respected, and typically evoke negative responses in their respective communities. By contrast, Tekniepe (2015) and Menendez et al. (2017) investigated rural

schools and noted that school board members are respected and elected because of their long history with the community, and voters choose them because they want people in power who represent the ideas supported and valued by the town for generations.

Tekniepe determined that school boards in small, rural towns are oftentimes the primary or only authority. It was determined through narrow focus on student learning and by becoming “critical friends who believe all children can learn,” school boards can overcome the naysayers and affect students’ education in positive, meaningful ways (Alsbury & Gore, 2015, p. 172). Heilgental (2015) studied habits developed by school board members, which directly correlated to student success. He discovered school boards need to focus on reinforcing district goals and examining data around those goals more than one time per school year, thus aligning with McCarty and Ramsey’s (1971) assertion about three of their power structures: Dominated, Factional, or Status Congruent Power Structure, but not Sanctioning. Heilgental recognized school boards use state testing data to assess achievement, but to see growth, districts need to look at summative and formative assessments, as well as listen to teacher leaders before making decisions for the district. Despite best efforts, boards still struggle with being dynamic and adopting best practices in the face of new or updated research (Bridges et al., 2019). The literature does not address how boards should be organized or communicate with their communities or superintendents.

Mangano (2018) conducted a phenomenological study examining how stakeholder theory of modern cooperation applied to schools, and she discovered schools with thorough communication elevated stakeholders’ opinions of the whole board and often led to trust in decision-making. However, over time, school boards began making

choices without the input of stakeholders as their political prowess grew, which led to power insensitive actions by board members, and thus damaged any efforts to build trust and support. Mangano recognized the importance of school board members self-reflecting and practicing soft skills, as well as concrete business. Similar findings were reported by Kenney (2020), and she found school board members often begin with an openness and a desire for real change, but they fall into the routine established by the board long ago, and the routine continues to limit community voice and sometimes even further silence voices of those above and below because of the long-established beliefs and traditions. This reality is a steep contrast to recent educational recommendations, which determined shared leadership or transformational leadership empowers and promotes educational goals (Bridges et al., 2019; Curry et al., 2018). The literature does not examine how the board leadership pairs with the superintendent's feelings about their role and effectiveness.

### ***Decision-Making***

If the board lacks the capacity to know and understand the districts' needs, it could damage the public's trust in their decision-making and the internal stakeholders' desires to stay employed with the district (Beckham & Willis, 2019; Black, 2009). Holmen (2016) discovered micromanagement eroded trust and degraded school culture, which derailed progress. Micromanagement is the most commonly cited challenge faced by administrators when asked about school board issues; board members who overstepped their roles led to lack of trust in the superintendent, which degraded the system of leadership in the district (Bridges et al., 2019). There was no available information to assess the specific source of micromanagement.

State school board associations are commonly consulted to provide framework for the performance of school boards, but school boards are not required to use recognized policy or frameworks; matter of fact, some school boards see the associations and national guidelines as power stripping, and so they shy away from them (D’Orio, 2020). School boards have the right to govern locally at their own wills as long as they follow state and federal law and report their policies to the departments of education (Scherer, 2020). Relying on state school board associations and other such nonprofit organizations has become the norm and the standard for decision-making in public education, thus many institutions provide guides or information regarding school board relations for the benefit of internal stakeholders finding representation with the boards (Scherer, 2020). Teachers’ associations have recognized boards only have authority as a whole, but they are responsible for approving the district budget and ensuring resources are distributed to meet districts’ need and goals (MSTA, 2018). The aspect of goals is essential to direct, and sometimes redirect, school board operations, which provide resources for teachers and support staff to best educate in classrooms. Mulvey et al. (2018) studied 49 out of the 50 states (excluding Alaska) and found Missouri along with Kentucky, Ohio, and Minnesota, to name a few, met criterion for training, fiscal management, community engagement, and mission and vision. In contrast, Missouri is among the 33 states that do not have any mention of accountability in their state guidelines, and they fail to provide training in the use of data, which is harmful in decision-making and the balance of power (Mulvey et al., 2018). When such information is ignored or not made a priority in the process, it can lead to competing agendas driven by board members and district administrators due to lack of understanding and communication, which leads to rising

tensions, especially if the district is engaged in major decision-making (Bridges et al., 2019). Decision-making is the primary function of a school board, but Underwood (2017) through her continued study of school board best practices defined three specific guidelines for successful board function: being accountable to the public, having transparent decision-making procedures, and being open to input from the public. School boards act in a political capacity, and they often use their own beliefs and agendas to create guidelines and rituals for meetings, which shows priority and willingness to serve through the direction of those actions (Bridges et al., 2019; Kenney, 2020). The study of boundaries respected or ignored by a board, as well as the depth and the width of those boundaries, is imperative to best navigate the politics and determine the directions those seven people might drive the school district with their superintendent included in some fashion; this information was not available in literature.

According to Polikoff et al. (2013), since 2000, school boards responsibilities have required more width than depth because of the ever-changing guidelines for district goals based on yearly reports. These yearly reports “should promote the valid interpretation of results from students’ assessments and school classifications” (Polikoff et al., 2013, p. 47), and the yearly reports are the proof the elected members of the school board are timely engaging in the mission and vision in relation to available data to ensure effectiveness of the district is always the focus of the board’s decision making (Adamson, 2018b; Ross, 2018). The increased encouragement for data-directed decision-making has led to a need for better professional development for school boards across the nation to train them in reading and synthesizing reports; when their decisions can obviously be linked to data and logic, it alleviates the mistrust and feelings around dysfunction from

the prospective of the stakeholders and the new and incumbent board members (Black, 2009; Ford & Ihrke, 2016; Hughes, 2015; Tucker, 2013). Polk (2017) discovered many school boards do not see themselves in need of support or additional training, which calls to question their level of self-awareness versus their success and progress. In the 1990s, test scores became the standard for judging school performance and student achievement (Dorn, 1998) and there was a focus on responsibilities of the district (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). This movement included No Child Left Behind and began the flood of new mandates and guidelines, which complicated the role of the school board because their knowledge base needed to govern required more support and delivery of information from the superintendent than was necessary in times past (Gutherie & Springer, 2004; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009).

Briggs et al. (2017) and LaMonte and Delagardelle (2009) recognized the need for school boards to take time to learn together, as the complexity of the school boards' role changes, in support of district measures to hire the best administrators, teachers, and support staff, and to provide them with the training and tools necessary to make the best decisions. Board members' values and experiences—including education—lead them in the reforms, mission, and vision they set for districts, and the boards' capacities to learn and understand the intricacies of culture, test scores, collaborative development, and curriculum lead to districts with positive outcomes for all students (Bridges et al., 2019; Briggs et al., 2017). Educated school board members are a hallmark of a highly effective board, which means board members must learn together and drive one another to increase their own relevant knowledge for richer decision-making (Black, 2009; Goodman et al., 1997; Klarner et al., 2020). This could create conflict and lesser degrees of success if

board members struggle to be self-directed learners, work with the superintendent, and invest time in the process (Ford & Ihrke, 2016). Part of the process requires identifying the gaps or weaknesses among the board members and within the district leadership, then filling the holes with professionals to best serve the district (Klarner et al., 2020; Menendez et al., 2017). Menendez et al. (2017) examined how important it is to be honest about these gaps in rural school boards because the members are better known and have a long history in the district, which can lead to misjudgments. To adequately recognize faults and weaknesses, the board and the superintendent need a structure set in place to take honest assessments of their knowledge bases, then professionally and respectfully discuss these gaps to devise a long-term strategy for success (Klarner et al., 2020).

The ideal school board, according to Klarner et al. (2020) and D’Orio (2020), would be a collection of community members who have a wide range of expertise and respect for the process and the education system, thusly creating a think tank of good decision makers; this implies Status Congruent school boards are a positive structure in school districts, but there is no definitive literature linking those concepts. This strategy for operation and decision-making was born of public corporations where stakeholders had force and pull in the institution, thus establishing that educational changes are lagging (Curry et al., 2018; Klarner et al., 2020; Xia et al., 2020). The way school boards make their decisions is more important than how many decisions are made; even if schools are slow to progress, if they are progressing in a positive manner, it is worthy of the investment of resources for students (Burnette, 2018; Schneider et al., 2017). Mulvey et al. (2018) similarly concluded it is not important how much money is spent, but how it

is spent. Schneider et al. (2017) agreed with Posamentier et al.'s (2017) assessment of ESSA, and their support for the efforts because their research discovered school districts that use funds sufficiently see results in performance and moral. Oftentimes, movement makes people feel like they are progressing, but there should be consideration given to construct validity, reliability, fairness, and transparency to best make choices to drive a district in an intentional manner. Instead of making changes just to appear proactive or choosing to ignore a need for change until the problem is so pronounced there is no real choice for school boards (Polikoff et al., 2013), it is essential for meaningful discussion to be had for true change and betterment of a district (Carlson, 2006; Pew Charitable Trusts, 2016). The changes to education during the tenure of public education makes is necessary for “boards to use data and information from multiple sources and in various formats, to identify areas for improvement, set priorities, and monitor improvement efforts” (Alsbury & Miller-Jones, 2015, p. 79).

Some considered components for improvement were timely classroom resources, cleaner and updated facilities, and sharper curriculum, all of which fall under the umbrella of school board power and accountability, as they direct the funds and approve the measures permitting the district to operate (Adamson, 2018b; Missouri State Teachers Association, 2018). Accountability is sometimes seen as black and white: the students perform poorly, so the school is bad, which is why Alfinio Flores' (2007) research looked for underlying components that affected school rankings and success; he found “it is important to recognize symptoms such as low achievement, it is even more critical to understand and address its underlying causes” (p. 29). Burnette (2018) explored the reporting of school monies is typically relayed in a lump sum and then reported as just

expenditures to state agencies and federal programs. School districts often do not make it clear specifically how the funds are being concentrated and how those measures align with the district vision and goals; thus, Burnette stated more accountability for school boards and school leaders is how schools will improve performance. This ideal echoed the mandates set forth by ESSA in 2015 (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2017).

### ***Power Distribution***

The power of a board, as established by Schueler (2019) and Welsh (2019), is mid-level and truly takes the reigns and drives the district beyond the scope of federal and state sanctions, such as in the ESSA (DESE, 2017). This power can be diminished or enhanced by the local mayors or state-level political leaders—making them a Dominated school district (McCarty & Ramsey, 1971); much depends on where board members reside within the district and how the structure lends itself to their opinions after they are elected (Schueler, 2019; Wong & Shen, 2003).

The transference of power to districts is what ESSA stands to bring about in a more public forum by requiring districts to publish their spending, unlike previously established guidelines (Burnette, 2018). Elgart (2016) said ESSA not only brought about a new level of trust for districts, but also a new level of accountability with requirements to publish and make public the school finances and the supporting data for decisions because of the newly minted idea that schools should focus on growth and self-comparison. Local-level school boards will have more autonomy to allocate funds to their buildings, but those boards will also have to make those financial decisions public, and prior to this education movement, state laws slowed or stopped local school boards from

education reform, but ESSA removed some of those shackles and freed boards to do what is best for their schools, trusting they would now what to do (Posamentier et al., 2017); however, according to The National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL, 2017), the power given to the local school board will continue to grow, which makes it important for agencies to understand the long-term implications. There was not literature found focusing on how power structures are to be respected or used in better decision-making with the enhanced autonomy and power given to school boards.

No matter how the influence or power flows, the school board has the utmost authority in the school district; it hires, fires, approves budgets, and determines the direction of the school—sometimes without conscious efforts (D’Orio, 2020). The power of the board begins with the duty of hiring a superintendent who supports the direction of the district. Boards of education are long-established agencies that hire and evaluate superintendents; if they are not of a progressive mindset, it is easy to maintain status quo by repeating and recycling the past decisions and ideals without outside input or influence (Kenney, 2020).

School boards with power and influence lead to increased student achievement, but only if those school boards understand the tone and vision of the district and act accordingly (Holmen, 2016). School boards are tasked with the great responsibility of running the district by directing funds and funneling them to meet the vision and mission of the district; however, their leadership is filtered through and molded by the seven members acting as one to make mutually beneficial decisions for the district and the community (LaMonte & Delagardelle, 2009). This model of business and power structure is called machine bureaucracy and was first explored in the 1970s (Bell & Hancock, n.d.),

but was further synthesized by Bolman and Deal (2017) in their scope of structures; Bolman and Deal recognized the tensions sometimes present because of decisions made at the top and then delivered by the administration, which can create a bump or void in the action of a district. Power in the district must be managed, or at least, navigated to keep the stress within the organization from driving out good leaders (Lefdal & De Jong, 2019; Mahfouz, 2020). This oftentimes leads to criticism and feelings of ineffectiveness, which creates a turnover of superintendents, as discovered by Grissom and Andersen (2012) in their study of superintendent job retention. The current national average for superintendent tenure is only 3.2 years, which makes district progress slow, or even stall (A. Rice, 2017). Grissom and Andersen lamented that superintendents are leaving at the rate of 45% when there are tensions between the board and the superintendent they hired.

Adamson (2018a), director of board services for the Indiana School Board Association, outlined the uncertainty plaguing superintendents when new school board members are elected. The changes one new person can bring to the temper of a school board are undeniable. Adamson admitted “the movement of seated members off and new board members in can be the precursor to career-altering events” (p.10), and it must be remembered the new members are now part of a whole, whose responsibility is to support the superintendent in the management of the multimillion dollar business of district education. In recognizing this, administrators must build trust with board members—no matter their backgrounds or goals—because school board members are elected by the public as one of the guardians of the district, and guardianship is what makes it essential for school boards to be held accountable for their decisions (Adamson, 2018b; Mulvey et al., 2018). Research indicated board member training and education are imperative if

board members are not familiar with educational protocols and needs because their ignorance can cause mismanagement of resources, including the superintendent (Ford & Ihrke, 2015; Mulvey et al., 2018).

Power can be both positive and negative, depending on how and when it is exercised; for example, when organizations do not allow for change when new information dictates it, the power is wasted and the school becomes ineffective (Curry et al., 2018). Some school boards operate within the power realm of win-win, as established by Xia et al. (2020), which is collaborative and decentralized, thus sharing power with the superintendent and respecting their knowledge base. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2016) recognized that when power is shared, such as in the win-win structure, and there is an investment in the best interests of students, the leaders are viewed as more caring than those who practice transactional leadership and focus on business at hand. Xia et al. (2020) also explained the opposing model called zero-sum; in this model the power is top-down and board-centered, or Status Congruent (McCarty & Ramsey, 1971). Alsbury and Gore (2015) determined only when board members—especially in the face of the negative reputation for the job—let go of their personal platforms and embrace a group or organizational goal can students' learning be positively shaped. There are school board members who do not fully understand their roles when elected, therefore they are more likely to fall into practices not in the true scope of power, even though the board is ultimately the delegated power establishing programs and ensuring district progress (Beckham & Willis, 2019). When lines are crossed between administrator and school board responsibilities, it creates a stumbling block for board authority (Bridges et al., 2019).

School boards have utmost authority and board members surveyed by Rocksund (2017) agreed authority must be exercised in alignment with the school's strategic plan because deviation will derail progress and student growth. Holmen (2016) found the practice of using power effectively is rare, with only 21% schools studied scoring effective in their use of power: 60% of those were high performing, leaving 40% labeled as underperforming. It is part of the board's job to acknowledge the superintendent's instructional and administrative expertise, and when they do not, they are failing the system and the superintendent they hired (A. Rice, 2017). There was no literature found describing the degree of acknowledgement or trust yielding success.

### ***Summary***

School boards were a fixture in schools long before superintendents were put in place. Historically and still in 2021, school boards are the keepers of school district power, and literature suggested that leadership, decision-making, and power distribution demonstrate the diversity in school boards' roles.

### **Summary**

The guardians of the districts are the board members elected by the community. The seven people on each board must meet baseline criterion and then run for a seat to be voted on by those who live in the district (MSBA, 2020). Many times, board members win elections because they own a business in town, they have political clout, or they carry a powerful family name; this is more common in rural school districts (Tekniepe, 2015). The management style of any leader or leadership team molds the institution and dictates the tone and culture, which greatly affects the power structures and the flow of business from boardroom to buildings and beyond. Power in all aspects of business,

including education, can lead to respect or rebuke (McCarty & Ramsey, 1971). This study examined power structures in Missouri school districts in relation to how effective their superintendents felt as leaders, thus filling the gap in the literature.

In Chapter Three, the methodology for the study was outlined for the purpose of providing complete understanding to the reader. Chapter Four presented the results gathered by way of the methodology for this qualitative narrative phenomenological study. The results were compiled and considered through the scope of the defined research questions, and that information was detailed in Chapter Five, along with recommendations for further research.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Introduction**

In the 48<sup>th</sup> Annual PDK Poll, the communities surveyed in the United States indicated their greatest concerns regarding their local school districts; the leading concern, totaling 19% of the votes, was lack of wise, long-term decisions for the district(s) (PDK International, 2016). The school boards' direct guardianship of the funds and district-level decisions creates a need for schools to examine how their boards function in conjunction with their superintendents and how to make them collaborate better for the service of students and the retention of faculty and staff (Billingsly, 2019). A primary indicator of board function is the power flow between the school board, the community members, and the superintendent, which was defined and explored through the research of McCarty and Ramsey (1971); they defined four types of power structures (Dominated, Factional, Status Congruent, and Sanctioning), which dictates the roles of those around the school board by virtue of the amount of power the board keeps for themselves. No matter the established district power structure, leadership is a focal point for many stakeholders. Superintendents fill a leadership role in their respective districts, and in examining power and the effectiveness of superintendents as leaders, valuable information can be added to the literature for schools to improve and engage in better decision-making. Chapter Three of this study presented the detailed methodology including tools, interview protocols, data collection, and data assessment built with consideration given to power in school districts and superintendents' feelings around their leadership.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative narrative phenomenological study was to discover how the structure of power in a school district made Missouri superintendents feel about their leadership styles and effectiveness. At this stage in the research, the power structures were generally defined as Factional (the most powerful community group gets the power), Sanctioning (the superintendent gets the power), Status Congruent (the board gets the power), and Dominated (the community leaders get the power), and the leadership styles were assessed through the lenses of transformational and transactional.

## **Research Questions**

Central Question: How do superintendents feel about their leadership effectiveness in the context of district power structures?

Research Question 1: How do Missouri superintendents approach leadership?

Research Question 2: How do Missouri superintendents approach decision-making?

Research Question 3: How do power distribution models alter or maintain superintendents' approaches?

## **Participants**

The participants in this study were limited to superintendents in public schools in the state of Missouri because the researcher resided there, and the vested interest and knowledge lent itself to the importance of the study.

## **Selection and Sampling**

A survey devised by Dr. Johnson (2007) was used with his explicit permission (Appendices B and C) for the first phase of this study. Surveys were sent to all Missouri

superintendents serving the 567 public school districts (DESE, 2019). The survey was used only to categorize each school into one of the four power structures (Sanctioning, Status Congruent, Dominated, and Factional) as defined by McCarty and Ramsey (1971). Once categorizing was completed, two districts from each power structure category were chosen at random—to maintain objectivity—using List Randomizer on Randomizer.org, which yielded eight superintendents to be interviewed.

Participants for this qualitative narrative phenomenological study were selected based upon the following criteria for school leaders of public schools in the state of Missouri. Missouri school leaders from public districts were selected to participate in the study; two district leaders from each of the power structures (Status Congruent, Factional, Dominating, and Sanctioning) defined by McCarty and Ramsey (1971) were included. This structure followed the phenomenological studies guidelines by Creswell and Creswell (2018) that stated five to 25 is the best sample size; it adhered to Morse (1994), who suggested to include at least six participants for interview-based phenomenological studies. Eight was the chosen number of participants because two from each category provided enough information to yield patterns for power structure assessment, but it did not overcloud the information pool, which would thereby create saturation and not add to the data set (InterQ Research, n.d.). This practice aligned with purposive random sampling that dictates the selection of people must be among those who have experienced the researched phenomenon (Heidegger, 1988), and choosing random participants from the sample supports research objectivity (Higginbottom, 2004). Each participant, as identified through the survey and random sampling, was given an informed consent to be signed, and once it was returned, the participants were contacted

via phone, and an in-person or ZOOM interview was scheduled and executed. All interviews were recorded.

In the spring of 2021, The Research Review Board (RRB) gave approval for the interviews to be conducted in person or on ZOOM or Google Meet platforms. Anonymity was provided to each participating superintendent by giving each superintendent a reciprocal numerical identification for use throughout the study. If at any point throughout the study participants decided to withdraw their consent, the option was provided and honored. In such case, another superintendent was randomly chosen from the appropriate power structure group to ensure the sample remained at two superintendents per defined power structure.

### **Research Setting**

The setting for the research was the state of Missouri. Note these interviews were not conducted in person due to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC, 2020) recommendation for social distancing during the time of the Covid-19 pandemic. Missouri was chosen was because the researcher resided in the state during the time of the study, and the research added to the knowledge base in which there was an invested interest. The study was designed to give a scope of power structure function and superintendent effectiveness among districts in Missouri.

Interviews were conducted with two superintendents from each of the power structure categories (Factional, Sanctioning, Status Congruent, and Dominated) as determined by using Dr. Johnson's (2007) survey. The power structure identification survey was successfully used by Johnson to complete his study. The interview questions and the survey were used in the pilot study conducted with the superintendent in a rural

central Missouri school district. This district was chosen for the pilot study because the researcher was employed by the district, thus restricting the use of the data obtained from this district. The pilot study was conducted to assess and ensure the interview questions were valid and reliable in conjunction with the survey used to categorize the school district's power structure.

### **Data Collection**

The RRB provided permission to begin the data collection, which started with dispatching the categorization survey (Appendix B) to Missouri school districts' superintendents through email. The goal was to get surveys returned by the Missouri superintendents to provide information about all four power structures. The survey and the informed consent were sent out multiple times to increase chances of yielding the results. If multiple surveys were not returned for each power structure, a note was made regarding this occurrence, and the available participants were interviewed for the completion of the data collection. This process was followed to maintain the systematic and sustained process of the study, as recommended by Groenewald (2004). When survey results were returned, the results were calculated, and each district was put in a power structure category based on their superintendent's survey responses. When multiple survey results were collected for each power structure, the respondents were loaded into Randomizer.org to narrow the participants to two superintendents per power structure.

Semi-structured interviews with prewritten open-ended questions, as suggested by Creswell and Creswell (2018), were conducted with the eight randomly chosen superintendents from the pool who returned the survey. The interview participants were provided with another informed consent before interviews were scheduled. The interview

information provided the primary data and was the first source for triangulation. Probes were used to glean additional information or explanation of concepts (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) during the interview process, but care was given not to lead or alter questions for any of the participants to uphold objectivity for the sake of comparing the collected data. The eight interviews were conducted via in-person, the ZOOM platform, or the Google Meet platform, dependent upon the participants' preferences and guidelines, and they were recorded for review and verification. Interview appointments were made with each superintendent to best suit their schedules. Interviews were scheduled for one-hour blocks. Notes were taken during the interview with emphasis on the Research Questions and the power structure in which the district operated as determined by Dr. Johnson's (2007) survey. These notes were later used to determine patterns and themes in the interview responses, and to determine pertinent versus superfluous information in the scope of this study and the research questions, as outlined by Dube (2020), to uphold the focus of the described phenomenon. Identification of themes and patterns was supported by the pilot process conducted with a rural Missouri superintendent.

Additional data were collected through the observation of the participant during the process and a review of the video recording after the interview concluded. The video was a platform for verification of the message and meaning of the superintendent's responses because it provided an opportunity to study of tone and body language. Reviewing this, instead of trusting memory, provided a more accurate analysis because memory is not perfect and a more objective approach was developed when watching, instead of participating (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

There were two additional data sources to achieve triangulation in the study. One was social media posts that were made by the leadership in the participating districts to assess the leadership style and the districts' support and values through what they post and who posts. Their social media platforms were found by asking the superintendents to provide links to their social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc.). The last process used for data collection was review of the districts' archival data pieces. The superintendents were asked to provide handbooks, mission and vision statements, and policy. These documents provided information about what the district put forth as an official public value and guide for operations. This was used to complete the triangulation and to ensure reliability and validity of the data.

### **Research Design Process**

A qualitative narrative phenomenological study was chosen because the objective was to obtain understanding of the feelings and the social effects of power structures based on the people (the superintendents) entrenched in the districts processes, as explained by Welman and Kruger (1999). A phenomenological narrative was the best method for this study because it captured experiences and feelings to build a reality, and it provided rich material by marrying texture and structure to the study content and research questions (Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015). Additionally, the phenomenological narrative provided a framework and a cleaning process for the raw data drawn from experiences, whereas a quantitative study could not capture the depth of information required to answer the established research questions (Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015). To begin, Missouri superintendents were chosen because they were integral in school function (Oplatka, 2017), and they were intimate parts in all power structures, as defined

by McCarty and Ramsey (1971), even if their relation was not considered forceful in the district. The interviewed superintendents represented a diverse pool of data and information around the research questions and the topic; the phenomenological narrative provided the necessary lens for the information to be aligned with the purpose of the study (Landegrebe, 1973). The initial step of surveying the Missouri superintendents was done via email because of the distances between districts in the state, and because access through email allowed for faster execution; the survey was uploaded into QuestionPro for faster results. The survey was chosen because it was based on research founded in the study's theoretical framework of McCarty and Ramsey (1971) and included current research by Johnson (2007). The survey chosen was a straightforward tool that categorized school districts based on allotment of power. Superintendents throughout the state of Missouri were included to yield the most diverse data, and two superintendents per power structure were interviewed to provide data for comparison to develop a richer description to support the phenomenon.

The schools' superintendents were put into a randomizer using Radomizer.org to increase objectivity in this qualitative narrative phenomenological study, and to keep the study focused on categories and not give opportunity for bias toward geographical location or district sizes, thus reducing the persuasion of personal consciousness (Groenewald, 2004). Two schools from each power structure were chosen to yield a sample size providing information for comparison but not overwhelming the study with data and interviews; this was important to accomplish the rich descriptions needed to support this qualitative narrative phenomenological study. The informed consent documents were emailed to each of the eight superintendents for ease and speed. If after

one week these were not returned, the randomizer was run again to get the name of another superintendent from the power structure category to maintain the pacing of the study.

The social media posts made in the names of the districts on Facebook and Twitter and the notes taken during the live interview coupled with the reflective notes taken using the recording were used to provide verification and validation. To establish unbiased results, policy handbooks were gathered from the participating superintendents' school districts to review their official policies and chains of command, thusly providing the last piece of triangulation for the study. Participants were permitted to review the information before it was used in the study, which is important in qualitative work because interview participants must feel at ease to provide focused and honest answers (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For additional validity and reliability, member checking was employed to make certain interpretations were accurate according to the participants; it was an ongoing dialogue throughout the process of coding and synthesizing information to ensure truth in the assessments (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Commonalities were reported out as results linked to the specified phenomenon of the power structure with names redacted to uphold confidentiality. This process was repeated for all four power structures, thus yielding comprehensive information about how the power structure in a Missouri school district makes superintendents feel in the way of their effectiveness as school leaders.

### **Triangulation**

Creswell and Creswell (2018) recognized triangulation as a process adds validity to qualitative studies. Triangulation is when information from different sources or from

different perspectives is assessed together to establish valid and unbiased themes and results (Carter et al., 2014; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This study focused on the use of triangulation to establish the validity and reliability of the collected interview information, social media posts, and archival data, thereby making the study useful for school districts, especially those in Missouri, in the assessment of their district power structures.

The triangulation of the data was held through the process of conducting live interviews via a virtual platform and then identifying themes based on the eight superintendents' responses, by gathering and reviewing the policy handbooks from the eight districts to assess official chain of command, and by collecting and assessing social media posts made by the district on Facebook and Twitter. Recording each interview made it possible to verify the notes and add to them because perspectives change when one becomes the viewer, instead of actively participating; this is described as Power Analysis by Lunenburg and Irby (2008). In addition to the notes made from the live interview, the interviews were transcribed to clearly define patterns and themes, which were color coded. After the information was coded and verified, the themes and patterns were compared between both participants within each identified power structure group to determine how the interview responses aligned with this study's research questions.

Participants' responses were verified and validated by using the districts' social media posts to determine who puts out the messages about the district and how those messages align with each leader and their feelings of effectiveness. This was further verified by examining the districts' policies, procedures, and mission/vision statements to

determine how the information agreed or disagreed with the overall feelings the superintendents expressed during the interviews.

### **Pilot Study**

A pilot study was conducted in a rural Missouri district because it was the researcher's place of employment when starting this study. The superintendent was given the same survey written by Johnson (2007), which determined the power structure for the district. Then the superintendent was interviewed in-person or via video conference and asked the same open-ended questions used in the primary study. This process guided the instrumentation development and the question refinement, as was recommended by Lunenburg and Irby (2008). The pilot study provided practical and pertinent rehearsal of the questions and the interview protocol (Appendix A). The same triangulation process using the district's policy manual in conjunction with social media posts was used for practice in triangulation with the interview data, which provided opportunity to identify potential gaps in the validation process. The feedback from the rural Missouri superintendent was taken and used to ensure the study had high standards and objectivity before moving forward with the eight superintendent interviews and data analysis.

### **Instrumentation**

This study was designed to assess how effective superintendents felt in the realm of the existing power structures in their school districts. Interviews were the primary data source, and the same open-ended questions were asked to all eight identified superintendents. These questions were developed using interview protocols and guidelines from Lunenburg and Irby (2008), Roberts (2010), and Creswell and Creswell (2018). Open-ended questions were vital to capture true responses from Missouri

superintendents, who represent the demographic this study was designed to help. Ten primary questions were developed to use during the interview with each of the chosen superintendents:

1. Describe your role here at (District's Name) and explain what your daily and monthly duties entail.
2. Describe the process by which you were hired and describe how that made you feel.
3. Tell me about a time you feel is the highlight of your service at (District's Name).
4. Tell me about a time you felt most frustrated in your role.
5. Explain the relationship between you and the school board as whole.
  - a. How has that morphed from your start with the district?
6. Explain your decision-making process in your current role.
7. Explain how the community and the school board influence your decision making.
8. Explain your leadership style.
  - a. What has been most influential in developing this style?
9. Tell me about the role of the community and the school board in the development of your leadership style.
10. What criterion do you use for determining whether or not a situation yielded a successful outcome?
  - a. How was this developed?

The interview questions were written in alignment with the research questions and with care not to lead or influence the superintendents.

Two interview participants were chosen from each power structure, as determined by the 27-question survey created by Dr. Johnson (2007; see Appendix B). Note the original survey had 42 questions because Dr. Johnson included demographic information not relevant to this study. There were no questions altered or added. He used the works of McCarty and Ramsey (1971) in conjunction with research from Dr. Richard G. Hess to develop his survey; the tool was used with his permission (see Appendix C). The survey was assessed using Dr. Johnson's assessment key he aligned with McCarty and Ramsey's Power Structures (see Appendix D).

### **Interviews**

Interviews were conducted in a one-on-one format to enhance participant comfort, and to assist with development of rapport between the researcher and the interviewee; interview protocol was developed and written using research from Lunenburg and Irby (2008), Roberts (2010), and Creswell and Creswell (2018). See Appendix A for full interview protocols. The interviews were conducted using the ZOOM platform, Google Meets, or in-person in alignment with guidelines during the Covid-19 Pandemic, which included requirements for social distancing and staying within one's town or bubble when possible to limit the spread of the virus (CDC, 2020). Before scheduling the interview sessions, the superintendents were contacted via email and by phone to open the line of communication. After the randomly selected participants verified their willingness to be interviewed, several interview times and dates were offered for their convenience; these appointments spanned an 8-week window. The interview participants were invited to the ZOOM or Google Meets session via email with calendar invites and

informed consent attached to assist with organization and confirmation of meeting times. If participants chose to do in-person emails, an email invite was sent as well. The interviews were scheduled for one-hour time blocks. Each interview participant was asked the same open-ended questions in alignment with the study's research questions. Probing questions to ask for elaboration or explanation were used when there was a need for clarity or details. There was care given to ask only the predefined questions and to avoid leading commentary or body language. These components to the interview phase were important to create a neutral environment with the hopes of yielding honest and comprehensive responses from the superintendents chosen for the study. Each interview was recorded using the ZOOM recording feature, the Google Meets recording function, or a digital recorder, and notes were taken during the interviews. After the interview concluded, the interview videos were downloaded onto a flash drive to make certain the information was saved and available for future reference. Each interview was transcribed and coded in alignment with the lead research question and the subquestions:

Central Question: How do superintendents feel about their leadership effectiveness in the context of district power structures?

Research Question 1: How do Missouri superintendents approach leadership?

Research Question 2: How do Missouri superintendents approach decision-making?

Research Question 3: How do power distribution models alter or maintain superintendents' approaches?

Permission was granted by the RRB to conduct interviews with open-ended questions and with the use of the ZOOM platform, Google Meets, or in-person. After approval was

granted, the process of gathering participants was started by sending out the survey to determine power structure categories. Interviews were conducted after all the research details and methodology were shared with participants to make certain no harm or unexpected outcomes were yielded throughout the interview and information collection in this study. Confidentiality for each superintendent was supported by assigning each one a numerical identifier, by which they were referenced throughout the synthesis of the findings. At the time interviews were conducted, the interviewees were all employed by their respective districts. There were no expenses included in the interview process because all communication was completed via phone calls, emails, or ZOOM/Google Meet, all of which are free.

### **Procedures**

As defined by Virginia Tech (2019), the procedures detailed completion steps, as outlined in the process section. To begin the process, a pilot survey was given to the superintendent in a rural Missouri district; this district was chosen because it was the district with which the researcher was employed during the study. After testing the categorization survey and interview questions, the power structure categorization survey was sent to all Missouri school superintendents; this survey was written by Johnson (2007) based on the theoretical work of McCarty and Ramsey (1971). The survey questions were sent using a QuestionPro link in an email. As the surveys were returned, each school was categorized as Dominated, Factional, Status Congruent, or Sanctioning Power Structure. The results were tabulated using Excel.

Using Randomizer.org, two districts were chosen from each power structure category. Those corresponding superintendents were contacted for interviews. The

interviews were conducted virtually due to the Covid-19 Pandemic guidelines (CDC, 2020). Each superintendent was asked the same set of open-ended questions that were tested and revised based on the input and feedback gained during the pilot interview. Care was given not to lead or influence superintendents' answers, and minimal comments were interjected only to encourage the superintendents to expand upon or explain their answers. After all eight (two from each power structure) superintendents were interviewed, the interviews were transcribed. The transcribed interviews were color-coded thematically to identify patterns and themes. The common areas were compared between the two superintendents from each of the power structures to yield results through the scope of the research questions.

### **Data Analysis**

The data were collected from the interviews, the districts' policy documents, and the districts' social media accounts; these three resources allowed for data triangulation. The interview data were initially assessed during the interview, but the interviews were recorded and transcribed to allow for in-depth analysis and coding (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The information was bracketed: it was viewed and analyzed using the four power structures (Sanctioning, Status Congruent, Factional, and Dominating) of McCarty and Ramsey (1971) and using Burns' (1978) and Bass' (1985) theories about transformational versus transactional leadership as the theoretical frameworks. Care was taken not to be biased for or against power structures (Factional, Status Congruent, Dominated, Sanctioning), as is necessary for successful phenomenological studies (Groenewald, 2004).

The next phase was to identify units of analysis based on the research questions to further focus on the relevant data pieces (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Using the themes aligned with the units of analysis, codes were developed. Once the interviews, the districts' documents, and the districts' social media posts were coded, the documents were split accordingly and organized based on the units of analysis; the source details were noted on each piece for citation of examples and quotes in Chapter Four (Foss & Waters, 2016). Themes were developed based on the repetition of concepts, and those themes were used to analyze and align the data (Groenewald, 2004) around McCarty and Ramsey's (1971) power structures. Commonalities were noted among the themes and then relationships and groupings were analyzed within the frame of the research questions (Foss & Waters, 2016); overlapping and repeating themes between the superintendents from like power structures were highlighted to identify the commonalities between them regarding power distribution, leadership styles, and leadership effectiveness. The information was summarized and divided between the units of analysis, and Chapter Four was organized with corresponding labels (Foss & Waters, 2016). The whole of the information was analyzed, then it was synthesized to develop the description and composite summary of the phenomenon for this qualitative study (Groenewald, 2004). The quotes and examples from the interviews, districts' documents, and districts' social media posts were used to support and exemplify the answers to the research questions (Foss & Waters, 2016).

To support the validity and reliability of the study, triangulation—including the superintendent interviews, school districts' policy documents, and school districts' social media posts—was used, as defined by Creswell and Creswell (2018). To achieve this, the

documentation was bracketed by power structure, separated by theme, and then coded. The information was recorded in Chapter Four and organized by theme to address the research questions. Throughout the process of thematically separating and coding the data pieces, member checking was used to verify the interpretations with the interview participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018); this further increased the validity and reliability of the data.

### **Summary**

Power structures dictate many of society's decisions and actions through the democracy built through decades and the systems put in place, beginning in the 1890s with the start of structured public education (Race Forward, 2006). Comparing the power structures of schools across the state of Missouri and looking at how they make superintendents feel about decision making and leadership effectiveness leads to the rich description of the phenomenon around each the power structure. This is new work based on the old theory of McCarty and Ramsey (1971) regarding the four power structures used to determine the flow of power and the influence of stakeholders at all levels within a school district.

The plan for assessing power structures in Missouri school districts and superintendents' leadership styles and effectiveness was outlined in Chapter Three. Chapter Four gave a detailed report of the study and explained individual parts of the tools and the results yielded, which underlined and highlighted the connections made through the methodology followed. Chapter Five presented the conclusions drawn from the research results with focus on how they connect with Missouri school districts and provided suggestions for further research.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS

#### **Introduction**

Chapter One introduced this study, Chapter Two provided a review of related literature, and Chapter Three outlined the methodology. This study examined four specific power structures, as defined by McCarty and Ramsey (1971), and determined how power distribution made superintendents feel as leaders and how their leadership styles were supported or thwarted by the existent structure in the districts. Chapter Four outlined the findings from the study and described the phenomenon around the superintendents' experiences; it additionally explored the commonalities between the two superintendents in each power structure and among the four power structures. Consideration was given to leadership style through the lens of transformational versus transitional leadership styles. Interviews were conducted with Missouri public school superintendents to gain insight into the research question areas. The interviews took 20-40 minutes, and prewritten questions (see Appendix A) were used with the interview protocol to establish consistency for reliability and validity purposes.

The design of this work was rooted in two theoretical frameworks: McCarty and Ramsey's (1971) ideas around power structures and Burns' (1978) theory regarding transformational and transactional leaders. In McCarty and Ramsey's research, they discovered and defined four power structures: Dominated, Factional, Sanctioning, and Status Congruent. They determined that each school district exists within one of these four power structures, and that identified power structure conveyed the flow and use of power in the district. Burns' work regarding leadership styles focused on transformational

leaders who rely on a wholistic approach and engage in collaborative decision-making and practice servant leadership. Transformational leaders are known for considering people and their needs, as opposed to the institution. Transactional leaders were the other focal point in the work of Burns, and those leaders are known for their attention to business-related operations, such as budgets and facilities. Both leadership styles are recognized as having useful tendencies for school district operation, and the works of Burns and Bass presented information that supported a need for balance between the two in successful organizations.

The purpose of this qualitative narrative phenomenological study was to examine how the power distribution in school districts led Missouri superintendents' leadership styles and feelings of effectiveness in their roles as district leaders. Through this research, seven Missouri superintendents were assessed based on their answers to the prewritten interview questions (Appendix A); the assessment brought together the works of McCarty and Ramsey (1971) and Burns (1978) to determine how effective superintendents feel as leaders in the scope of the existent power structure in the district for which they work. The information was coded and then grouped thematically to provide a comprehensive picture of the school districts and their respective leaders within the frames of the three research questions. Chapter Four explored the participants' demographics, the codes and themes, and the relationship between the codes and themes and the research questions.

## **Overview**

Before interviews participants could be identified and chosen, Missouri superintendents were emailed a survey (see Appendix B) that included scenarios about

superintendent experiences aligned with McCarty and Ramsey's (1971) power structures. This survey was written and developed by Johnson (2007) in connection with Oklahoma State University, and it was meant to identify the power structures within school districts. Johnson gave his expressed permission to use and publish his survey in Appendix C. This was determined using Johnson's key (Appendix D). After survey responses were collected, superintendents from each power structure were put into an online randomizer. The randomizer determined which superintendents were interviewed, and those individuals were contacted to set up interview times and modes (virtual or in-person). Two superintendents from each power structure were interviewed; the exception was the Factional Power Structure because there was only one school that fell into that category, according to the survey. Seven total superintendents were included in the interview process. Interviews were conducted with questions (Appendix A) that were aligned to the research questions, and the interviews were conducted via ZOOM, but each superintendent was given the option to use Google Meet or to meet in person.

### **Research Questions**

Central Question: How do superintendents feel about their leadership effectiveness in the context of district power structures?

Research Question 1: How do Missouri superintendents approach leadership?

Research Question 2: How do Missouri superintendents approach decision-making?

Research Question 3: How do power distribution models alter or maintain superintendents' approaches?

## **Writing Results**

Interviews were transcribed using ZOOM's transcription capabilities, and the information was coded based on major ideas in the interview. Themes were developed with consideration to the codes and the research questions. Districts' policies and social media accounts that were provided by the superintendents who participated in the interviews were referenced to provide triangulation of information. Additionally, member checking was used to clarify or verify information from the interviews to ensure accuracy. Themes and codes were entered into individual tables (see Appendix E) for each power structure, and the tables were used to track information that was triangulated using the aforementioned information sources. Common phenomena were reported out and key quotes were included for each power structure to highlight commonalities between the two superintendents who were interviewed as representatives of each power structure in Missouri school districts.

## **Descriptive Information**

### ***Pilot Study***

The pilot study was conducted with a superintendent from a rural Missouri school; she was chosen because the researcher worked in the district. The pilot helped to refine the interview questions with relation to the research questions. After discussion with the pilot superintendent, Interview Questions 7 and 9 were split into two parts when asked to the superintendents because they lumped the school board and the community together, and for clarity and accuracy, they were split into 7a, 7b, 9a, and 9b. This allowed for the answers to be more detailed and focused.

## ***Survey***

The survey was emailed to 836 Missouri superintendents and assistant superintendents. Email addresses were provided by DESE. Note that Dr. Timothy Dilg was omitted from the scope of the study because he served as a committee member for this dissertation process. Additionally, the superintendent who participated in the pilot study was omitted because of her advanced knowledge and discussion of the study.

QuestionPro was used to distribute the survey and collect the resultant data. The survey was active for 3 weeks, and reminders were sent two times to the superintendents to provide ample opportunities for responses to the survey, then the data was exported to an Excel sheet for safe keeping on a password-protected computer. There were 212 Missouri superintendents who viewed the survey, 141 superintendents started the survey, 52 dropped out and did not complete the survey, and 89 participants completed the survey. Of the 89 completers, 33 agreed to be interviewed. The responses from those who agreed to the follow-up interviews were viewed individually and categorized by power structure based on the survey key (Appendix D), as provided by Johnson (2007). Respondents were entered into Randomizer.org by power structure to yield a list and the two participants chosen by the randomizer were emailed the informed consent and instruction for scheduling an interview in person or via video conference.

## **Interview**

Note that among those 33 superintendents who completed the survey and agreed to be interviewed, there was only one school district/superintendent that met the criteria for a Factional power structure, thus that superintendent was by default interviewed and there was not an additional interview to provide comparative data. The six randomly

chosen interview participants and the one Factional participant were asked to choose three interview times, and the researcher responded with a calendar invite for the time that best suited the schedule. All participants were provided options for interviewing that included ZOOM/Google Meet interview or an in-person interview, based on their comfort levels and preferences. All seven superintendents chose to use ZOOM.

## **Participants**

There were seven superintendents who participated in this study's interview process. Among them were two superintendents from Dominated school districts, one superintendent from a Factional school district, two superintendents from Sanctioning school districts, and two superintendents from Status Congruent school districts. There was only one Factional superintendent because the survey data only yielded one school that met that criterion.

According to McCarty and Ramsey (1971), Dominated school districts have school board members who were selected because of their ties to powerful community members and because they took decision-making advice from those powerful community members; the superintendent in this structure was considered functionary. The first superintendent from a Dominated school district led a small school, and she had 17 years of educational experience and 7 years of superintendent experience. She will hereafter be identified as D1. Superintendent D1 led a district that was housed on one campus with only one principal and served 181 students, DESE (2021). The second Dominated School District was led by a male superintendent with more than 20 years of educational experience; he had 17 years of superintendent experience, and it was his 5<sup>th</sup> year with his current district. Hereafter, he will be referred to as D2 for anonymity purposes.

Superintendent D2 worked for a medium-sized district approximately one hour from St. Louis, Missouri; it served 2,107 students (DESE, 2021) and had four school buildings that made up the campus. The district had two elementary buildings, one middle school, and one high school.

Factional school districts have school board members who represent one key group in the community, and they vote according to the group's ideals; the power in the district shifts when new factions join the school board, and the superintendent must flux along with the new district trajectory (McCarty & Ramsey, 1971). According to the survey results, there was only one school that was Factional. This school was led by a male superintendent with more than 20 years in education and 3 years as superintendent; he had only ever worked in small districts. His district was small and rural in the southern part of Missouri. This school district served 699 students and had three school buildings, including elementary, middle, and high schools (DESE, 2021). This superintendent will be referred to as F1 from this point forward in the study.

In Sanctioning school districts, the boards do not have ties predetermined community visions established by past generations; the board follows the superintendent absolutely (McCarty & Ramsey, 1971). Two school superintendents whose survey responses indicated their districts fell into the Sanctioning power structure were interviewed. The first of these oversaw a large district—the largest district compared to the other six schools in this study—with a total student enrollment of 9,963 (DESE, 2021). The superintendent of that district had 20 years of superintendent experience; August 2021 marks the beginning of his 21<sup>st</sup> year. He was headhunted for his current position, and he had been there 7 years. Prior to that, he served as superintendent in two

other districts with 7 years in each place. The second superintendent who represented the Sanctioning districts in this study led a smaller district with only 881 students enrolled. He only had one year of superintendent experience, and August 2021 marks the beginning of his second year. Prior to his current position, he was a principal for 5 years and he was a classroom teacher for 10 years.

The survey results indicated that Status Congruent made up the largest number of responding Missouri superintendents. Of the 33 superintendents who completed the survey and agreed to be interviewed, 15 were Status Congruent. Status Congruent school districts operate with superintendents who are advisors to the board; the board is comprised of individuals who do not identify or align with power groups, and a hierarchy tends to develop within the seven-member board (McCarty & Ramsey, 1971). There were two superintendents who were randomly chosen using Randomizer.org to represent this power structure in this study. For anonymity, the superintendents will be referenced with SC1 and SC2 from here forward. SC1 led a district of 7,574 students; she did not start in the education field until she was 30 because she started her professional life as a banker. In Arkansas, she taught middle school special education and served as a middle school principal before becoming assistant superintendent. She came to Missouri to be superintendent in her current district four years prior to this study. SC2 led a medium-sized district that served 4,742 students; he had 31 years of experience in education, with 12 of those years having been served in his current district as a superintendent. He was the longest serving administrator in the district. See Table 1 for detailed comparisons between participants' demographics.

**Table 1***Participants' Experience and Identifiers*

Participants	Years in education	Years in current position	Dissertation identifier
Dominated Superintendent 1	16	6	D1
Dominated Superintendent 2	28	5	D2
Factional Superintendent	20	3	F1
Sanctioning Superintendent 1	27	7	S1
Sanctioning Superintendent 2	17	1	S2
Status Congruent Superintendent 1	20	4	SC1
Status Congruent Superintendent 2	31	12	SC2

**Data Analysis**

To code the interview information, interviews were transcribed and printed. Each interview was read, and notes were taken on the big ideas that were conveyed by the superintendent. These notes were abbreviated into codes; for example, conflict involvement became C. Each time conflict was mentioned explicitly, C was noted in the margin. If community involvement was implied, the video recorded interview was reviewed for clarity. If there was still a question regarding the inclusion of community, the superintendents were emailed to verify the comment.

The analytical approach used in this study included looking for common phenomena in both interviews conducted for each power structure, then triangulation was used to verify the information provided by each superintendent. The districts' social media posts, posted policies, and faculty handbooks (if available) were used for triangulation, in addition to member checking. The personal information that the

superintendent provided, such as experiences, was only verified using member checking because there were not available documents to confirm such information.

The coding process was independent for each power structure. First, each interview was read in its entirety and important concepts were underlined and noted. Then a list of common threads between the two interviews for the single power structures was made, and code words were developed to make identification easy. Each interview was scrutinized and synthesized, and the codes were applied throughout the interview transcriptions. Then the codes were divided into broader themes and those themes were used to organize the interview content. The code and theme information for the two interviews were put on one table for ease of comparison and tracking of data validation; each school was represented with a different font color for ease of reference. The process was repeated for each power structure; however, there was only one Factional school district, so those data were not cross compared.

### **Verification/Trustworthiness**

This qualitative phenomenological narrative study involved interviews, and that information was verified, when possible, using the school districts' social media accounts, policies, and procedures that were provided by each participating superintendent. Member checking was also used. The superintendents' feelings and personal learning were not able to be verified, aside from with member checking. The referenced resources provided means for data triangulation.

### ***Triangulation***

Triangulation provides a means for verbal qualitative data to be verified, as established by Creswell and Creswell (2018). Primary data were gathered from the

participants' interviews. Information given was then scrutinized through the scopes of what the districts put out on social media and what policies and procedures the districts had in place regarding the common themes that were identified in the interviews.

### ***Member Checking***

Member checking made it possible to clarify information given during the interview process. Initial member checking was done after the interviews were coded and the codes were developed into themes; each participating superintendent was emailed the themes and focus areas that came from coding, and they were asked to verify the information and add to or change any information that they felt was not accurate. No changes were made to the interview data because all seven superintendents verified that the themes and overarching messages in their interviews were accurate. In addition, the interviews were transcribed, the video documents were reviewed, and then questions were sent to participants regarding any ambiguous or incomplete information. These questions were addressed via email or phone conversations, depending on the superintendents' comfort levels and availabilities.

### **Dominated**

#### ***Theme 1: Decision-Making***

This theme was comprised of four codes: trust, connection, collaboration, and action. These codes were included with decision-making because the superintendents both discussed these elements in relation to the interview questions that asked about their decision-making process. Table 2 presents the occurrences of each code within this theme. Trust was mentioned in regard to earning it to gain freedom in decision-making because both districts said that their decisions were directed by plans and their reasoning

had to be made clear to get the boards' support. They both reported that consideration to all stakeholders had to be made apparent to get the necessary support for decisions to come to fruition. Connection was a chosen code because they both reported that they communicate with groups and individuals outside of the school to gather informal input toward decisions to help feed feelings of trust in their competencies. Collaboration was mentioned by both Dominated superintendents, but D2 discussed collaboration three separate times, and it was only brought up once by D1 in the larger district. Both made comments about conditional collaboration. According to D2, "You need to know when to collaborate and know when waiting is bad." Superintendent D1 stated, "Collaboration must be conditional. When time allows, I need to make my style more collaborative." Action was discussed multiple times by each superintendent. They discussed that the board makes the decisions and then action must be taken based on the decisions made. Both superintendents recognized that there were times when action had to be taken immediately, and in that case, they reported that they made a choice they knew the board would support, which required knowing the board. In addition, both stated that day-to-day operations and decisions did not include the board.

**Table 2**

*Dominated Theme 1 Code Occurrences*

Decision-Making Codes	D1	D2
Trust	8	6
Collaboration	8	5
Board Action	3	2

## ***Theme 2: Serving***

This theme had four codes: community, school board, students, and faculty/staff. These were all stakeholder groups that both Dominated superintendents mentioned serving in their roles. In counting the times that each superintendent mentioned each stakeholder group in relation to serving, the school board was mentioned the most. Each interviewed Dominated superintendent mentioned serving the school board nine times. Table 3 shows the breakdown for recurrence of all codes. Both superintendents said that they had learned their board and had worked to develop a relationship, so they knew how to best serve board members' goals as community representatives. Superintendent D1 described her relationship with the board as "golden." The other superintendent, representing D2, called the relationship between the board and himself "respectful and supportive." Both mentioned multiple times that the board was ultimately who they answered to and considered; however, D1 mentioned that factor the most, repeating it four times in the interview, and D2 mentioned it twice. Community was the next most mentioned group served, and D1 mentioned them eight times, but community was only mentioned three times by D2. Both superintendents were explicit in being visible to serve the community because without being with the people, they could not know what they want or need. Students were a major focal point for D2; he mentioned serving them six times, and finalized his interview message by saying, "children are the most precious thing." Students were only mentioned once by D1, and she said, "It is important to be with them to make sure things are smooth." When asked to explain, she said that she had expectations, and she wanted to make sure students were being well-served. She also made assessments for students' services when she completed teacher evaluations, which

she did because there was only one principal in the district, and she helped him by doing teacher walk-throughs. Faculty/staff was the last code used to support the superintendents' service in their districts. Both recognized teachers and principals as important because they were directly in contact with students. Caring for faculty and staff and including them in decisions was important to both superintendents.

**Table 3**

*Dominated Theme 2 Code Occurrences*

Serving Codes	D1	D2
Community	8	3
School Board	9	9
Students	1	6
Faculty/staff	3	2

***Theme 3: Leading***

There were three codes that fell under this theme: learn, reflect, and plan. The repetition frequencies of all codes are exemplified in Table 4. Learning was in the theme of leading because both superintendents discussed how their knowledge had made them more assertive in their roles as time progressed. They said that knowing about who does what and how it all fits together in the system gave them the “backbone to lead.” In addition to the ground knowledge of the district providing them the tools to really lead, D2 discussed how much clubs in his own school experience helped him learn leadership skills and bring him to the place he was today, leading a district. Reflect was coded and aligned with leading because D1 and D2 considered how situations played out in the past before moving forward with any district-level event or decision. Through reflection, the superintendents formulated philosophies by which to practice, and they returned to those ideals to assess the districts and their personal roles. Plan was included in leading because

they both mentioned defining outcomes and trying to foresee who would be affected before recommending action or taking action for the district.

**Table 4**

*Dominated Theme 3 Code Occurrences*

Leading Codes	D1	D2
Learning	6	6
Reflection	9	3
Planning	5	3

***Theme 4: Managing***

Train, business, facilities, finances, and mediation were the codes for this theme. Managing really captured the transactional components of the superintendent job and it emphasized the superintendents’ obligations to oversee the budgets and buildings. Business was the most mentioned code in this theme. Both superintendents discussed their roles in establishing programs, professional development, and principal duties. Day-to-day operations were described by both in relation to what they were mostly responsible for in their respective districts. Training for the school board members was also mentioned by both Dominated superintendents: D2 said, “I try to teach the board the key concept that not every decision rises to the level of board decision.” He also discussed frustration with lack of concrete, required board training beyond the initial, so he was always looking for more and better. In the same vein, D1 said, “I give the board a prepped script, scripted answers, for certain situations.” She went on to say that she did this to try to keep the turbulence at a minimum in the district and in the community, even though some board members did not always follow what was given. Finances were a management piece because both superintendents named them as their primary concern,

and they both regularly worked with the board to better the districts' financial situations. In D1's small district, the finances were not good when the superintendent took over. D1 said, "Finances were bad, I had to learn to make them better and really do financial management." The other superintendent, D2, said, "Here, district budgets, state regulations and concerns are the primary focus. They are what I manage." Closely related to finances is facilities, which was another component echoed by both Dominated superintendents. They reported that they have to know the need, when it is needed, and make sure they have the materials ready to go when the time comes. The final piece to management is mediating. Mediating was mentioned three times by D1; she said that she mediated the principals to get them on board, after the board weighed in on the issue. Superintendent D2 said he was very careful not to micromanage, but he kept everyone moving forward on what the board decides. See Table 5 for the codes' occurrences.

**Table 5**

*Dominated Theme 4 Code Occurrences*

Managing Codes	D1	D2
Training	4	3
Finances	4	1
Facilities	3	3
Mediating	3	1

**Factional**

***Theme 1: Business***

Business was a pervasive theme throughout the interview with F1 and it included three codes: money, facilities, and planning. Table 6 breaks down the number of times F1 repeated each code. Money was coded under this theme because the superintendent said his approaches and his duties were primarily around finances because the district did not

have a lot of money, unlike the neighboring districts. They hoped to pass a new bond issue, so they were keeping their promises and building the district business around the tax levy that they promised, even though they could go higher. He said, “Success depends on how finances look at the year-end...and sometimes we have to get creative with our finances.” Facilities are part of school business because they create a business situation that supports the construction of a new building, and they were trying to be more energy efficient; they had upgraded windows and lighting already. In the past, they discussed a bond, but “it failed miserably because the superintendents’ offices were included in the renovations.” The new focus, he made clear, was to get the buildings fixed to improve students’ learning environments. Planning was the last code included in this theme. It was included because he discussed how flexible they had to be with their business in the face of COVID-19 and their other district plans and goals. He said, “It is best business to plan to continue to do what we said, even though money is better than we thought.” Business in the district was dictated and defined by money in many cases, based on the whole of the interview.

**Table 6**

*Factional Theme 1 Code Occurrences*

School Business Codes	F1
Finances	22
Facilities	10
Planning	2

***Theme 2: Decision-Making***

Decision-making was comprised of five codes: trust, students, faculty/staff, community, and school board. Table 7 shows the times each code was repeated in the

interview. Trust was included in decision-making because D2 said, “To make good decisions, you have to believe in your heart you’re doing what’s right, and hope that others see that to understand why you’re doing what you’re doing.” He went on to explain that superintendents have to get to know people and build trust, which he did by always doing what he said, even if situations change, unless follow-through is just impossible. He said, “I want them to know that Mr. F1 means what he says, and if he says we are going to do it, that’s exactly what we will do. Then they will eventually say ‘we can trust him.’” Regarding this staff, he got rid of the time clock to build trust and to send the message he respected them like adults. Students were included in decision-making because he repeated “it’s what’s best for kids” throughout his explanation of how he determined if a decision had a successful outcome; this was repeated six times. He also said that he knew if he made the best choices for faculty and staff, then they would take care of the kids. Faculty/staff was included in the codes for decision-making because he said he was always examining how decisions affect teachers, like when he knew the COVID-19 guidelines were too much on them, and he wanted to care for teachers because he wanted to retain them. Teacher retention was on the forefront of his decision-making because turnover was 20% when he started there 3 years ago, and it had been his intention to get it to the current 5%. It was important to him that faculty and staff know they are all family. He did say that they had salary issues that were “an absolute mess,” and he was working through that to help the faculty and staff. Community was the next piece to this theme because he knew that he needed to build trust with them, and he did not want his choices to stress the taxpayers. He said they were suspicious and there were so many dynamics, but “if the finances are bad, the community will be bad anyway,” so

he was trying to balance. In F1’s district there was also consideration to which community members were related to the board when making district-level decisions. The final component to decision-making, as asserted by F1, was the school board. He said, “everything radiates from the board,” and he said that they sometimes disagree, but come back together. He had several medical professionals on the board, so they could bring a strong front that no one wanted to challenge. This was especially true during circumstances regarding COVID-19 last year, and it had left everyone frustrated. He lamented, “Sometimes they go with my recommendations, sometimes not...I just give them the facts.” Decision-making was complex and multifaceted for F1.

**Table 7**

*Factional Theme 2 Code Occurrences*

Decision-Making Codes	F1
Trust	11
Students	10
Faculty/staff	10
Community	9
School Board	13

***Theme 3: Leadership***

Leadership had four codes: communication, conflict, reflection/learning, and support. Reflection/learning was the most prevalent code in this theme, it was repeated 14 times throughout the interview; see Table 8 for complete record of code repetition. F1 stated that his leadership was formed and continually developed through his reflection on his daily actions and his learning that centered around Jesus Christ and a book called *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*. Both of those influences were what made him into a servant leader, which he recognized as paramount to being a leader. F1 stated that he

learned to “own mistakes but keep opinions closer to the vest” in his current district. He recognized that there was no script, he had to learn and decide with a goal in mind. Conflict was the second most referenced code, and F1 stated that he had learned to resolve disagreements and conflicts in ways that minimize the possible negative outcomes. F1 stated, “My main goal is to problem solve, and not let it blow up.” He discussed disagreements with board members, faculty/staff, and community members that were caused by changes and disagreement with the course of action. As a leader, he described the importance of keeping the kids in mind and being transparent when resolving disagreements. Communication was mentioned in regard to keeping the board abreast of issues and changes and encouraging “people to talk and listen and have sincere conversations,” to successfully navigate leadership in the district. Support/serve was the least mentioned code within this theme, and in those talking points, F1 stated that in his leadership “it is not so much a top down approach, it’s about supporting everybody and making sure they have what they need.” He deemed himself a supportive-type leader.

**Table 8**

*Factional Theme 3 Code Occurrences*

Leading Codes	F1
Communication	4
Conflict	11
Reflect/learn	17
Support/serve	2

**Sanctioning**

***Theme 1: Decision-Making***

Decision-making had seven codes as follows: experience, community, school board, kids, delegate, support/trust, and self-action. Table 9 shows the number of times

each code appeared in the interview transcripts. Experience was included in this theme because both superintendents talked about how their previous experiences helped define their decision-making processes. S1 discussed training he had regarding contemporary leadership skills and his experiences in Boy Scouts that helped him to formally define the pieces that go into good decision-making. Community was included in decision-making because S1 and S2 referenced the community values that they considered before making decisions about programs or policies. S1 got a bond issue passed this last year, with 80% approval from the community. He recognized that the big themes around his decision-making comes from the community; S1 stated, “We see their (community) thoughts on a lot of stuff and gather feedback before moving forward.” S2 commented that “no matter what, they [community] are included in the process of decision-making.” The school board was included in decision-making because S1 and S2 recognized that they deliver information to their boards through the board presidents to get their perspectives before making final decisions. S2 said that his board “opened their arms to him” and was eager to see what was next after the successful 2021 school year. S2 said, “they (the board) let me alone to do my thing; they recognize that I have to be able to lead.” He recognized that they disagreed at times, but the board supported his choices publicly. S1 stated, “I have been fortunate and had pretty supportive boards.” Kids were included in this theme because both superintendents recognized that all of their decisions were made to support and do what was best for kids; S1 mentioned this three times, and S2 mentioned kids 11 times. Unlike the superintendents in the other three power structures, S1 and S2 mentioned that they delegated many of their decisions after providing guidelines. Support/trust was included because the decision-making success was reported to hinge on

having the support and trust of the school boards; this was mentioned three times by S1 and five times by S2. Self-action was the final code included in this theme because both superintendents included discussion around times when they made the ultimate or final decisions. S1 stated, “There are times when I’m just going to make the decision. It’s my call. I don’t care what anybody else is going to say, and people will see what types of decisions those are.” S2 said he asks himself how to make things better on a continuous basis, and then he tries to do it, and he strives to do what he said when he said it because he wants people to feel that he will deliver.

**Table 9**

*Sanctioning Theme 1 Code Occurrences*

Decision-making Codes	S1	S2
Experience	7	3
Community	5	8
School Board	10	17
Kids	3	11
Delegate	1	3
Support/Trust	3	5
Self-action	4	2

***Theme 2: Managing***

As shown in Table 10, there were four codes included in this theme as follows: hire/fire, money/assets, physical presence, and operations. S1 reported that he felt it was his duty to protect the profession and dismiss employees that “do something a little over the top.” S2 stated that hiring was nerve-racking because he wanted the people to have passion for kids and learning, that was important to him for all of those who worked in the district. Money/assets were discussed only by S1 regarding the bond issue that was passed in April; he and his team had worked on managing the funds that were incoming

and aligning them with projects. Physical presence was mentioned four times by S2; he said he felt it was important to be physically in the buildings to learn about needs and to hear from people. S1 reported that his physical presence in the monthly team meeting was essential to creating successful teams and programs, so he knows what is happening in time to positively manage situations. Operations were explained by both superintendents as aspects that take much of their time to ensure the district was moving forward. S1 stated that he tended to be “like an orchestra conductor; making sure everybody’s filling their roles at the time when they are needed.” S2 said he had to stay current on everything, and he had his “fingertips in a lot of different things” because the district was widely spread geographically (25 miles between two buildings), and he needed to make sure they were moving forward together.

**Table 10**

*Sanctioning Theme 2 Code Occurrences*

Managing Codes	S1	S2
Hire/Fire	5	2
Money/Assets	2	0
Physical Presence	1	4
Kids	3	11
Operations	9	5

***Theme 3: Vision/Mission***

Table 11 shows how many times each code was repeated in the interviews. There were three codes included in this theme as follows: planning, collaboration, and communication. Planning was mentioned 12 times by S1. S1 discussed defining topics and schedules for the district teams and school board, and he mentioned being a three-dimensional thinker: “Sometimes planning is not sequential, you have to think in three

dimensions, but I am pretty organized and process system oriented. I like to put plans in place.” S2 explained that he did all of his brainstorming and drafts visions for the district, then he took them to the teams. He said, “I always want a pretty good plan, so I give them (stakeholders) steps and timelines, as well as the why.” Collaboration was included in vision/mission because S1 and S2 depended on district leadership teams (including principals, counselors, special education directors, and other specialty directors) to set goals and define their missions and determine how to achieve goals or meet plans. S2 included information about how he wanted the teams to communicate with him, so they have a stake in the goals and mission. Both gathered feedback from their teams to fill in the blanks and make their plans more successful. Communication was included because they recognized that each subgroup within their districts communicated differently, so they had to learn and adjust and communicate their missions and visions accordingly. S1 and S2 both reported that their formal communication was with their board presidents, instead of the whole board, and that they communicated with faculty and staff most regularly and informally. They used Facebook to convey messages to the community about their actions and goals, as they developed and changed. S2 said, “I communicate and start with the district leadership team, then it flows down to staff, and then to the community.” S1 and S2 focused on the importance of feedback in developing their district goals and actions, and they took the feedback to create collections of input for future references; S2 referenced this as a “feedback database.”

**Table 11**

*Sanctioning Theme 3 Code Occurrences*

Vision/Mission Codes	S1	S2
Planning	12	8
Collaboration	7	8
Communication	10	19

**Status Congruent**

***Theme 1: Growth***

There were four codes included in this theme: learning, conflict, trust, and judgement. Learning was a primary experience that led SC1 and SC2 to see the big picture and find their growth mindsets; mentors, focused research, and previous bosses were mentioned by both as key contributors to their professional growth. Conflict was included in this theme because it generated past frustrations for both superintendents that contributed to their experiences and learning to help them better respond the next time. Trust yielded growth because SC1 and SC2 reported they earned trust from stakeholders through delivery of expectations, and that gave them latitude to explore options and grow. S1 said, “sometimes you have to make hard decisions and spend chips, and you hope you put enough chips in your pocket early on” regarding the need to do things that are not always conventional for the betterment of the district. S2 said, “I have the confidence to let my own people go and step out of the way, and not micromanage, because it hinders growth—theirs and mine.” Judgment was a primary code within this theme because SC1 and SC2 discussed bringing their true selves and knowing what that is to make sure they end up in the right positions to help their professional growth. S1 stated, “most influential for me has been time and experience,” when asked about

influences on her leadership development. Table 12 reports the number of times each code was repeated in the interviews.

**Table 12**

*Status Congruent Theme 1 Code Occurrences*

Growth Codes	SC1	SC2
Learning	11	5
Conflict	4	1
Trust	9	14
Personal Judgement	14	5

***Theme 2: Decision-Making***

There were six codes that contributed to decision-making as follows: community, collaboration, students, faculty/staff, school board, and data. To see the overview of how many times each code was repeated, see Table 13. Community involvement in decision-making was more prevalent for SC1 than for SC2, but both recognized the community support for the school, and they respected that it was the community’s school, kids, and money. Collaboration was the most repeated code for this theme; SC1 stated that “nothing happens in isolation...everything has a ripple, so everyone needs input before choosing.” Furthermore, she commented that her default was to include others in decision-making because authoritarian leaders are not accepted anymore. Both superintendents referenced their teams and the importance of upholding the team, although SC2 admitted this can be frustrating at times. Students were mentioned by SC1 and SC2 as their focal points for successful decision making. SC1 said their [district’s] decision-making was filtered by student safety, student learning, and efficiency. SC2 said, “I always try to tie everything back to what’s the impact on students,” when making choices. Faculty/staff were mentioned regarding boosting morale with decision-making,

and that was a consideration for both superintendents. The school board was included in decision-making because SC1 said she knew they were invested and “as super [superintendent], you must align with board goals and agree to them. You all must be moving in the same direction.” SC2 recognized the board as policymakers, and he made efforts to work well with them. Data contributed to both superintendents’ decision-making processes by way of looking at achievement gaps and “setting goals based on numbers.” SC2 said that he “generally looks hard at the data to assess outcomes” because he wanted to quantify how effective the investment was, although he depended on his team to provide the data pieces.

**Table 13**

*Status Congruent Theme 2 Code Occurrences*

Decision-making Codes	SC1	SC2
Community	7	3
Collaboration	15	9
Students	3	5
Faculty/Staff	3	2
School Board	11	2
Data	5	4

***Theme 3: Managing***

Finances, policy, balance, and directing were codes included in Theme 3. Table 14 presents the total number of times each code was repeated in the interviews. Finances occurred the most; SC1 and SC2 had bonds pass in spring of 2021. They were directing the funds and managing construction projects for their respective districts. Policy was included in managing because they recognized that the board sets policy, but they were responsible for overseeing it. SC1 commented, “Policy is set by the board, but managed by me.” Likewise, SC2 stated, “obviously the board sets policy, and so I have to live

within their policy; policy is the biggest way the board influences me.” Balance was a code indicating the need for superintendents to bridge the gaps between people groups, wants, needs, and policy. SC1 reported that she felt “there is a balance between top-down board, but they are not overly involved with the community stuff...I think there is a very nice balance here. Not too secret, not too public.” SC2 said, “I’m less swayed by a board member than I might have been earlier in my career”; he reported feeling that he knew how to strike the balance between people after years of experience. Regarding directing, both superintendents reported feeling that they had to show and lead people to meet district goals. SC1 stated, “I am a traffic cop, and I take a systems approach...knowing is best because when something goes off the rails, I need to identify and fix it.” SC2 said, “My all my departments’ [focuses] are support for the main mission and also make people see what we are doing.”

**Table 14**

*Status Congruent Theme 3 Code Occurrences*

Managing Codes	SC1	SC2
Finances	8	5
Policy	3	4
Balance	2	1
Directing	7	4

***Theme 4: Leading***

There were three codes this theme, including informing, relationships, and communication. Table 15 exemplifies the repetition of each code for each interview. Informing was included in this theme because SC1 and SC2 said they were resources for stakeholders. SC1 said, “liaison to the board is what a superintendent does...I inform them about what issues they want to know about on a daily basis.” SC2 reported, “My

position is to keep them [the board] informed...I provide the board with information, clarification, and examples.” Relationships were key for SC1 and SC2 to lead because they said that when the rapport is good, more progress can be made. They both named COVID-19 as a frustration because it had divided them and the other stakeholders, thus making movement and progress nearly impossible in their districts. Both felt they had good professional relationships with their board presidents, and they expressed hope for everyone uniting as the world moves past COVID-19. Communication was the last piece to leading because they both did community outreach and worked on two-way communication with the board and community. SC1 said that she communicated more with this district than she had in any other. SC2 recognized that listening is a major piece to communicating successfully, and he tried especially to not only hear, but listen, to others.

**Table 15**

*Status Congruent Theme 4 Code Occurrences*

Leading Codes	SC1	SC2
Informing	3	3
Relationships	7	3
Communication	12	4

**Research Question 1**

Research Question 1 was this: How do Missouri superintendents approach leadership? Each superintendent was asked interview questions (see Appendix A) around this question. In the interview process, the researcher and the participants discussed district operations and approaches to the superintendent role. Each of the seven participating superintendents captured the essence of their own leadership capacities by

sharing examples and occurrences in their districts. Through the scope of Research Question 1, the Dominated superintendents' interviews yielded four themes and 13 codes, the Factional superintendent's interview yielded three themes and 12 codes, the Sanctioning superintendents' interviews yielded three themes and 14 codes, and the Status Congruent superintendents' interviews yielded four themes and 16 codes.

***Power Structure: Dominated***

Research Question 1 was this: How do Missouri superintendents approach leadership? The dominated superintendents responded to 11 questions that provided information about how they lead and what type of leaders they were in the capacities of their respective districts. There were two Dominated School Districts studied for this research. The superintendents were interviewed via ZOOM, and the interviews were transcribed and coded. Identifiers D1 and D2 were used to track the data between the Dominated participants.

The four themes that came from synthesizing the Dominated interviews were decision-making, leading, serving, and managing. Decision-making in alignment with Research Question 1 had two relevant themes: trust and collaboration. In the interview, D1 stated, "I have to be intentional (in decision-making) to build great relationships...and really build capacity with new board members." She also went on to discuss that she reached out to many stakeholders, such as the mayor, to involve all stakeholders in plans because she would rather overcommunicate, than under communicate. Participant D2 said, "I have to uphold my reputation as a leader, and what I said I would do, I have to deliver." He echoed the sentiment that he liked to talk to people to get information out, he emphasized that it is important to really listen, and he focused on talking about

excellence as a model for others. These spoke to their leadership styles, and they indicated that they both worked to gain stakeholders' confidence through being out and about in their communities and collecting input and ideas.

Serving had four corresponding codes in the frame of Research Question 1. The first was community. Regarding that, D1 explained that she tried to always be very visible and building strong relationships with parents because she knew "that taxpayers pay [her] salary, so community is important." D2 established his belief that as a leader he must live in the community and use community norms to influence his choices. The school board and students were additional codes within this theme. The school board gained the most attention in this theme with seven responses from D1 and four responses from D2 in alignment with Research Question 1. D1 was always trying to build relationships with the board, and she was always working on her relationship with them because it is her responsibility, as a leader, to keep them from being surprised and to talk through all disagreements. D2 recognized his board as respectful, and he appreciated that they maintained norms. He felt that after years of service, he knew how they wanted things to be handled, and he was always checking with them to ensure that he was on target. D2 recognized that he felt responsible for each kid in his district; he said, "Students are the most precious thing, and students must be cared for like my own kids." D1 tried to be with students to make sure that she was knowledgeable about what was happening and their needs to make things run smoothly. Faculty/staff was the last code in this theme, and both superintendents said they talked with principals and others, as they encountered them, to make sure they felt comfortable with them as a leader. D1 wanted

to be approachable and D2 indicated that he wanted his faculty and staff to feel cared for by him.

Leading in the frame of leadership approaches included three corresponding themes: learning, reflecting, and planning. Learning and reflecting were not able to be triangulated with the data pieces because they were personal to the superintendents. D1 stated that she “must keep adding to knowledge because I wear many hats...and I have watched and learned about people and their needs to serve better.” She went on to explain that she was working on her doctorate to expand her learning experiences. D2 said he focused on learning about who knows what, so he could include the right people in the right places. He referenced his work as a teenager in Future Farmers of America regarding his foundational leadership skills; in addition, he read a lot and never stopped learning through experience. Reflecting is how both superintendents used their careers and the roles of those they knew to influence and build their capacities as leaders. D1 often considered her previous superintendent when determining a course of action, and D2 thought “adopting a philosophy is important, then I reflect on that before recommending a course of action.” Planning came into play for D1 when she explained that she defined a set of outcomes before proceeding to publicize information or action because she wanted to make sure she was clear about the goals. D2 planned so he was prepared even for the worst-case scenarios, like when funding is withheld.

Managing was the final theme. Looking at Research Question 1, there were four codes included. Training was related because D1 tried to identify when the school board needed retraining, then she provided the resources and opportunities for it to happen because she wanted them prepared, especially when new board members join. The

comments from D2 were focused on his own training, instead of the board, and he managed that by trying to always reach out to others and find out what others are reading or doing. He said, "Leadership training is essential." Facilities was the next code, and the occurrence was minimal, but both mentioned that as leaders, they needed to know the physical aspects of the district to address questions and needs. Finances were included as a code because D1 said when she took the superintendent position, the finances needed work, so she had to make herself well-versed in budget management to find success. D2 said that "district budgets, state regulations, and concerns are my primary focus." Mediation was the last code, and it covered the importance of mediating communication with the school board and with principals to get everyone on the same page, but D2 mentioned that he was very careful not to micromanage. For full breakdown of Dominated codes and themes framed by Research Question 1, see Table 16.

**Table 16***Dominated Codes/Themes for Research Question 1*

Themes	Codes	RQ1	
		D1	D2
Decision-making	Trust	3	2
	Collaboration	3	2
	Board Action	0	0
Serving	Community	4	2
	Board	6	5
	Students	1	4
	Faculty/Staff	3	2
Leading	Learning	5	5
	Reflecting	4	2
	Planning	5	1
Managing	Training	3	1
	Facilities	4	3
	Finances	4	1
	Mediating	2	1

***Power Structure: Factional***

Research Question 1 was this: How do Missouri superintendents approach leadership? There was only one Factional superintendent interviewed for this study. See Participants for participant demographics. For the sake of anonymity and privacy, the Factional superintendent was referred to as F1. In the parameters of Research Questions 1, the Factional superintendent's interview yielded three themes and 12 codes.

The first theme was school business, and it had three accompanying codes as follows: finances, facilities, and planning. Finances was the most commonly reoccurring code with 16 occurrences. F1 explained that his district did not have a lot of money, in comparison to neighboring districts, so he was very cognizant of spending and hoped to

pass a bond in the coming years. He mentioned that “success depends on how finances look at year end.” As a leader, he wanted to make sure that the taxpayers’ money was well cared for and spent responsibly. Facilities were mentioned seven times within this frame, and his focus was to get the buildings looking better to improve learning environments for students. They had building needs district-wide, and he was working on building trust and planning for the future in the face of a failed bond measure. Planning was something that F1 tried to do, but he recognized that many components have to be in place before planning can happen; he said, “we just have to plan to be flexible when things change,” regarding his approach to leadership in his district.

The second theme related to Research Question 1 was decision-making. Decision-making had five codes, as follows: trust, students, faculty/staff, community, and school board. Trust and faculty/staff were represented equally with eight occurrences each within the frame of F1’s leadership approaches. F1 repeatedly mentioned that it was important to him, as a leader, that he does what he says. F1 admitted that there was currently a lack of trust between the school district and the community, so being steadfast would hopefully build that missing trust. To build trust with staff, F1 got rid of time clocks, despite the principal’s reservations. Faculty/staff had been a focus for F1 because when he started, the district faced high turnover rates of approximately 20%. As a leader, he worked to empower people and let them know he valued them; he said that his message was that “we’re all family.” Looking at F1’s leadership, students were mentioned six times, and the overall message was “success is when you’re making a positive difference in kids’ lives, and it’s about doing what’s best for them.” He had worked to implement more and better early childhood services in the district since his

start there. Community and school board were tied with four occurrences in the scope of Research Question 1. He recognized that his position required him to know his community, and he strived to build trust with them. He also recognized that he must consider how the community was related to the board members because that affected his dealings with people. F1 said that COVID-19 strained his relationship with the board, and that it ended his honeymoon phase with them. He said, “Everyone is frustrated. It is just so hard.”

Leading was the final theme of consequence to Research Question 1. It had four corresponding codes, including communication, conflict, support/serve, and reflect/learn. Of the four codes, reflect/learn had the most occurrences with 14 instances. F1 referenced Jesus Christ, previous mentors, and books as influencers to his leadership style. He mentioned that he had even learned from bad leaders. He had learned to own his mistakes and be a servant leader. He believed that leaders need to be active, and he stated, “I run to smell the roses, I don’t stop to smell them.” He said his main goals as district leader were to set goals and solve problems and not let those things generate issues or “blow up along the way.” F1 mentioned conflict in his leadership role, and he said, “sometimes faculty are on the fence and uncertain. I have to make sure they don’t go over the fence.” He recognized that change is hard on people, so he was careful not to be frustrated when they got frustrated. Support/serve was mentioned twice regarding his leadership approaches, and he revisited and expanded upon his drive to be a supportive leader and “just supporting everybody and making sure they have what they need” was his focus. Communication was discussed regarding leadership, and he simply said, “I just try to

keep the board abreast.” Table 17 shows the theme and code total occurrences for Research Question 1.

**Table 17**

*Factional Codes/Themes for Research Question 1*

Themes	Codes	RQ1
		F1
School Business	Finances	16
	Facilities	7
	Planning	1
Decision-making	Trust	8
	Students	6
	Faculty/Staff	8
	Community	4
	School Board	4
Leading	Communication	1
	Conflict	4
	Support/Serve	2
	Reflect/Learn	14

***Power Structure: Sanctioning***

Research Question 1 was the following: How do Missouri superintendents approach leadership? There were two Sanctioning superintendents interviewed for this study. See Participants for more information regarding the superintendents who were randomly chosen for participation. For the sake of anonymity and privacy, the Sanctioning superintendents were referenced as S1 and S2. The Sanctioning superintendents’ interviews had three themes (decision-making, managing, and vision/mission) and 14 codes (experience, community, school board, kids, delegating, support/trust, self-action, hire/fire, money/assets, physical presence, operations, plan/prep, collaboration, and communication) associated with Research Question 1.

Decision-making had seven codes: experience, community, school board, kids, delegating, support/trust, and self-action. Experience was mentioned the most by S1 within the scope of Research Question 1. S1 mentioned it seven times, whereas S2 mentioned it only three times. S1 discussed training he received and provided around leadership and adult learning; he said the foundation for his leadership came from his experience in the Boy Scouts, and he focused on fostering successful outcomes.

Reflective was the term that S2 used to describe his leadership experience. He mentioned that his personal education journey influenced his leadership the most; he had earned four degrees, including his doctorate. Community and school board were each mentioned once by S1 within the scope of leadership approaches, but neither of these concepts were mentioned by S2. S1 stated that he had parents that helped with initiatives, and he depended on them to help; he recognized that the parents got results and helped the most recent bond to pass. His mention of the board included expanding and exercising his capacity to grow the board to better serve the district. Kids were mentioned once by S1 and eight times by S2 when they discussed their leadership approaches. S1's statement was, "we are always looking to grow programs for kids," in response to his primary duties in his role. S2 explained that seeing kids evolve and grow was what made him go into superintendency, and he "realized it was the kids [he] loved. It just felt good to help kids," when he was reflecting about his role in the district. Support/trust was mentioned one time by S1 and three times by S2. S1 discussed his capacity as a leader and said, "We [district] are growing around our support for adults," which he explained was part of his professional goals for the district. S2's comments about support/trust included explaining that he knew he had to maintain visibility to build trust with the people through

relationships, which in turn made them honor him more as their leader. Self-action was the last code, and it encompassed what the superintendents do for their districts without input or without collaboration. In the frame of Research Question 1, S1 mentioned a time when he was speaking about leading personnel, and he said, “sometimes, I’m like, yeah, that person needs to go, and I don’t care what anybody else said”; he went on to explain that it was his job to keep the most honorable people in roles because that was how the district succeeds. Self-action was mentioned twice by S2, and he said he took action every day to make the school better, and what he says is what he delivers to build leadership capacity.

Managing was the next theme, and it included four codes: hire/fire, money/assets, physical presence, and operations. Operations was the most mentioned by both Sanctioning superintendents. When asked to describe his regular duties, S1 said, “I tend to be like an orchestra conductor, making sure that everybody’s filling their role all the time when they need to fill it.” He went on to explain that sometimes he is putting out fires, but most of the time he is planning and trying to stay one step ahead. Both superintendents said that they had their hands in multiple things all the time to keep everything running smoothly because they felt that was their primary role as leaders. S2 explained that his district was spread out over about 25 miles, so he must take a different leadership approach than he did in his previous districts. He felt he needed to know about each building, so he made a point to visit at least one building per week to build his leadership capacity and their trust in him. Hire/fire was mentioned by both superintendents regarding their approaches to leadership. S1 said that he sometimes had to get rid of people because “they did something a bit over the top,” and he had to make

sure that there are academic gains. He removed building leaders and adjusted the placement of people and saw bigger gains than the district has seen previously. He had frustrations with ill-placed administrators that he had to navigate to help the district get back to their goals. He said, “part of our superintendent role is to protect the profession,” which he did by keeping the right people in the right jobs. S2, conversely, found hiring nerve-wracking and hoped never to fire, but he recognized that the people he employed must be excited about kids’ education. He again recognized that he only had one year of superintendent experience, so he knew with time, he might have to fire someone.

Physical presence was a focal point for S2 more than for S1. S2 said he was rarely in his office because he was always “out and about”; he commented that as a leader, “people want to see you and approach you.” S1 said he was always present at the meetings around the district to keep tabs on all of the business. Money/assets was the last code for this theme, and it was only mentioned by S1: “As a leader, I’m proud that we passed the first bond in the district since 1992. They (stakeholders) came up with 240 million worth of projects, but I ended up only asking for 35 million.” His goal was to build confidence in the system and in him for future projects.

The final theme was vision/mission, and it included three codes, as follows: plan/prep, collaboration, and communication. Plan/prep was mentioned nine times and seven times by S1 and S2, respectively. S1 said he makes plans for the district’s future, and he always defines the topics for the monthly meetings he has with his different teams. He also did a lot of research into topics, such as projects related to future district needs and the current bond, and he tried to be organized to “really put plans in place.” He commented, “There are many elements to it (leadership), leadership and operations and

planning, you know all of that stuff, it all drives the last piece to get results. If no results, then my effort didn't do too much." S2 had a different approach to planning because he generally came up with an idea or goal then took it to others to get it off the ground. He said he "brainstorms during the summer using a tiered process that starts with vision, then ideas, then goals." He described his leadership approach as "very much visionary."

Collaboration is something that both Sanctioning superintendents engage in with their leadership teams. S2 had several meetings each month that included principals, counselors, assistant principals, directors, and of course board meetings. He used that time to get a pulse for the district to help him lead. Additionally, he did book studies with his school board during regular meeting times to help them come together on big ideas. S2 gave his district leadership team big ideas and let them discuss and run with it because they often come up with better ideas than he had initially. Both superintendents said that they had fantastic teams that helped them be better leaders. Communication was the final piece contributing to managing in the scope of Research Question 1, and S1 said, "right, wrong, or indifferent, I give my opinion." S2 discussed his desire to build relationships, and he explained that when he became superintendent, he researched what worked and did not work in other districts between the board and the superintendent. The research led him to understand "communication was the key," so he was in constant communication with his board, even when nothing important was happening. He said he communicated and always tried to stay positive to keep the levels of trust and respect, and he was careful to always communicate his why. He even created the first district Facebook page to facilitate more communication with stakeholders. He said, "I hope my staff says, he's a good communicator, he communicates well, and keeps us up to dates on what's going on."

He values our opinions. That’s what I think they would say.” To see the complete breakdown of themes and codes for the Sanctioning superintendents, see Table 18.

**Table 18**

*Sanctioning Codes/Themes for Research Question 1*

Themes	Codes	RQ1	
		S1	S2
Decision-making	Experience	7	3
	Community	1	0
	School Board	1	0
	Kids	1	8
	Delegating	1	3
	Support/Trust	1	3
	Self-Action	1	2
Managing	Hire/Fire	3	2
	Money/Assets	2	0
	Physical Presence	1	4
	Operations	7	5
Vision/Mission	Plan/Prep	9	7
	Collaboration	6	4
	Communication	2	15

***Power Structure: Status Congruent***

Research Question 1 was this: How do Missouri superintendents approach leadership? There were two Status Congruent superintendents chosen randomly to be interviewed for this study. See Participants for demographics about these superintendents. To ensure anonymity, the Status Congruent superintendents were referenced using SC1 and SC2. The interviews were coded and then the information was grouped by themes. There were four Status Congruent themes with 16 codes relating the Research Question 1. The themes were growth, decision-making, managing, and leading.

Growth had three codes relating to the superintendents' leadership approaches. The first was learning. Learning was the primary focus for SC1 in this theme. She explained that her leadership was grown by her experiences in small districts before coming to this larger district. She credited her mentor for most of her personal growth around leadership, and she focused on the big picture because she had K-12 experience in her background. She additionally believed that experience and learning from mistakes is the best teacher. Learning was mentioned seven times by SC2 in the scope of this question, and he explained that he studied to develop his approaches. He had learned not to take his team for granted through the process of serving as the district's leader and he had learned to listen. He credited those with whom he had worked with for his professional growth in leadership. Trust was the next code, and it was mentioned three times by SC1 and 12 times by SC2. SC1 said that she knew she had to deliver and meet board expectations, and she said it can take time to understand those. She made a point to always research information, and she responded to inquires as quickly as possible. SC2 commented that he was the longest serving administrator in the district with 12 years of service, so they trusted him. He said the most beneficial thing he had learned was, "to celebrate victories, but admit mistakes, so when I say something, they (board) can trust it is accurate." He said he had trust in his people to do their jobs and not micromanage, which he learned by experience. Judgement was the final contributor to growth. SC1 mentioned it 10 times, and SC2 mentioned it four times. SC1 discussed her need to use judgement to determine what to be said and when, especially to media and civic groups; she admitted this had taken time to hone her judgement as a leader. She currently felt that her rapport with stakeholders was good, and she said, "from my perspective things are

going very well.” Furthermore, SC1 said that time and experience had grown her as a leader, which helped her from the beginning to now in her district. She learned to bring her genuine self and felt “that administrators always need to bring genuine selves to the job.” SC2 stated he went from feeling nervous in the district to relaxed as the process unfolded and he learned how to operate successfully as a district leader.

Decision-making was the second theme contributing to Research Question 1.

There were six codes as follows: community, collaboration, students, faculty/staff, school board, and data. Community was mentioned by both superintendents in the same manner; they expressed delight in the fact that their respective communities were behind them and supported their efforts. SC2 went on to say that three bond issues had passed since he started there almost 13 years ago. Collaboration was the most mentioned code by both superintendents. SC1 recognized that authoritarian leaders are not accepted anymore, so she had learned to talk it over with her team and reach out to others for input. She described herself as collaborative, and even repeated that sentiment in her closing remarks: “It’s not just me up there telling them what to do. I am so very much collaborative.” SC2 practiced his leadership in a different configuration because there were several assistant superintendents alongside the head superintendent in his district, and they were a five-person central office team. He said that his leadership style was “collaborative coaching.” He said he had always preferred to work alongside people, as opposed to telling them how to do it. Students were briefly mentioned by both in that they focused on students’ readiness and safety and tried to remind adults that kids rely on them. Faculty/staff was also briefly mentioned by both: SC1 recognized that she knew good money situations boost morale, and SC1 said that he wanted to serve faculty and

staff so they could care for kids better. School board in this frame was only mentioned by SC1: “There is pressure to be the best because they (board) want their decision to hire me validated.” Data were included by both, which were not included in the superintendents’ interviews for other power structures regarding this research question. SC1 explained that she looked at student achievement, teacher retention numbers, and budget to assess how she was doing as a leader. She said, “I have to use data overtime to prove myself.” SC2 said that he looked at hard data to assess outcomes, but he usually depended on others to give him the data to quantify his investments.

Managing was the next theme, and it included four codes: finances, policy, balance, and directing. Finances fed both superintendents’ leadership approaches because they discussed that community people are interested in that aspect. Both districts passed bond issues in spring 2021; SC1 reported that her bond passed with 79%, and SC2 said his bond passed with 78%. They both tried to honor fiscal responsibility in their district leadership roles. Policy was included in this theme, but it was only mentioned one time by each superintendent. SC1 said she tried to always honor the policy set, whereas SC2 discussed helping the school board to be a governing body and policymakers. Balance was mentioned by SC1, but not by SC2, and she said she enjoyed her job because it provided balance to her lifestyle, so that came through in her leadership because people know when someone likes their job. Directing was mentioned by both, and SC1 said, “I’m a bit of a traffic cop, but I take a systems approach,” regarding her leadership in the district. She tried to always know about district business because she had to fix it when “something goes off the rails.” SC2 said he supported the main mission and commits

when he knows something is right for the district. He tries to remind the board of their roles and keeps them focused on policy as much as possible.

Leading was the final theme. Informing, relationships, and communication were the codes in this theme. Informing was the least mentioned by the superintendents. SC1 only commented that she needed to be a resource to the stakeholders, and SC2 said that he recommended best practice and policy for finance and operations. Relationships was the next code, and it was mentioned more by SC1 than by SC2. SC1 described that “forming relationships and partnerships outside of the school is really important.” She said that as a leader, she always tried to make the board look good and get involved with different stakeholder groups around town. SC2 said that his leadership had changed just because he and the board had gotten to know each other better, so that helped with the relationship piece. Communication was the final code and that was the most commonly reoccurring code within this theme for both superintendents. For SC1, communication was about community outreach and exercising two-way communication with the board. She tried to always communicate with the board to vet ideas through them and keep them in the loop with weekly updates. SC2 said that he informally communicated with the board and tried to be highly responsive to their inquiries. He said, “communication is a two-way street, so I have to listen well to serve well.” For the full account of the code and theme yields, see Table 19.

**Table 19***Status Congruent Codes/Themes for Research Question 1*

Themes	Codes	RQ1	
		SC1	SC2
Growth	Learning	14	7
	Conflict	0	0
	Trust	3	12
	Judgement	10	4
Decision-Making	Community	5	2
	Collaboration	10	5
	Students	1	2
	Faculty/Staff	3	1
	School Board	1	0
	Data	5	4
Managing	Finances	7	5
	Policy	1	1
	Balance	1	0
	Directing	6	3
Leading	Informing	1	1
	Relationships	5	1
	Communication	7	4

**Research Question 2**

Research Question 2 was this: How do Missouri superintendents approach decision-making? The seven participating superintendents were asked interview questions to yield information about Research Question 2 (see Appendix A). In the interviews, the superintendents were asked to delineate their decision-making processes and then asked to explain how the board and the community influenced their decision-making. Framing their answers with Research Question 2, the interviews with the Dominated superintendents yielded four themes and nine codes, the Factional interview

yielded three themes and 11 codes, the Sanctioning interviews yielded three themes and eight codes, and the Status Congruent interviews yielded four themes and 11 codes.

***Power Structure: Dominated***

Research Question 2 was this: How do Missouri superintendents approach decision-making? The following codes and themes were within the frame of Research Question 2 only. See Research Question 1 and Research Question 3 sections in this chapter for information about those focus areas. Superintendents D1 and D2 were interviewed, and through the process of data analysis, the research found the following themes: decision-making, serving, leading, and managing.

Decision-making was comprised of three codes, including trust, collaboration, and board action. Trust was reference three times by each superintendent. D1 made sure to always give the board and community all the facts when making big decisions to build trust, and she let the board know her reasoning and deferred to the facilities plan when making choices. She felt it was important to always communicate the why. D2 got feedback from all stakeholders when making decisions because he wanted them to feel confident in his choices. He said it was important to “make sure community norms are present in decision-making.” Collaboration was mentioned three times by D1 and two times by D2. D1 reached out to get principal feedback to help her make decisions. She took time to collect input, but she said she also had to take a moment to assess when collaboration was appropriate and when it was not. D2 said he was always careful to respect all sides when making decisions, and he knew it was important to ask questions to gain understanding of what the best decision was. Board action was also mentioned by D1 three times and by D2 two times. D1 said she knew the board ultimately makes

decisions, but she has learned them, so if she knows the board will agree, she will go ahead. D2 commented that “the board ultimately makes decisions and takes action.” He said he had learned to be flexible, especially with COVID-19, because the board was not always moving in the same direction.

Serving was the next theme, and it included three codes: community, students, and faculty/staff. Community and faculty/staff were mentioned by both superintendents. D1 said that her strong ties to the community helped her makes decisions in the face of problems because she knew what they want and value, and D2 said he “must use community norms in decision-making.” Faculty/staff was mentioned one time by D1, and she said, “involving teachers and principals in decisions is comfortable decision-making.” D2 also mentioned principals in his statement: “The principals must be considered when making decisions, so they can rally the faculty and staff.” Regarding the decision-making process, students were only mentioned by D2; he said, “I must consider how decisions affect students...I makes decisions based on what needs to happen to help kids.”

The third theme included in relation to Research Question 2 was leading. Planning was the only code related to this theme and question. D1 said that for decisions about projects, she got specifics, bid sheets, and board input and then followed it to a T. In a more detailed answer, D2 said, “I must look at how things will affect faculty, staff, students, and then plan how to rally everyone around the action.” He admitted that his decision-making has to be flexible because there are unforeseen needs, especially with COVID-19.

The final theme was managing, and it included the codes training and facilities. Training was mentioned by both superintendents, but facilities was only mentioned by

D1. Regarding training, D1 said that she worked to train each board member and remind them that they all had to come together to make one decision. D2 tried to teach the board that not every decision rises to the board level, but he said it is “a work in progress.” D1 commented that her decisions about facilities really come down to knowing what a current need is and what can wait because they are recovering financially. See Table 20 for the full scope of the codes and themes for Research Question 2.

**Table 20**

*Dominated Codes/Themes for Research Question 2*

Themes	Codes	Occurrences	
		D1	D2
Decision-making	Trust	3	3
	Collaboration	3	2
	Board Action	3	2
Serving	Community	1	1
	School Board	0	0
	Students	0	2
	Faculty/Staff	1	1
Leading	Learning	0	0
	Reflecting	0	0
	Planning	1	2
Managing	Training	1	1
	Facilities	1	0
	Finances	0	0
	Mediating	0	0

***Power Structure: Factional***

Research Question 2 was this: How do Missouri superintendents approach decision-making? There were three themes and 11 codes pertaining to this research

question that were yielded by the interview with the Factional superintendent. The themes were school business, decision-making, and leading.

School business had three codes, including finances, facilities, and planning. Finances were mentioned six times. F1 reiterated his sentiment about leadership approaches when discussing decision-making; he said, “my approaches are again primarily around finances.” He went on to say that he had a lot of needs, but the assessed valuation was not there to support them all, so he had been “creative with finances.” Facilities fed into his account of decision-making three times, and he reported that much of his decisions had been made with energy savings in mind because that was something people are backing, and it saves money. Planning was only mentioned one time, and he said he planned to make decisions around the plan that he outlined before COVID-19 was a consideration, but he would do no more than that, even if the finances were better than expected because he was trying to build trust through his decision-making.

Decision-making was the next theme. There were five included codes as follows: trust, students, faculty/staff, community, and school board. Of the codes, students was repeated the most. F1 stated that his “decisions come down to what is best for kids.” He repeated this sentiment two additional times throughout the interview process. Trust and faculty/staff were each mentioned two times in the frame of Research Question 2. F1 said that in his approach to decision-making, he “has to believe in his heart that he is doing right, and hope that others see that to understand the why.” To build trust, he always linked his decision-making to his focus on education, and he aimed to take care of the faculty/staff because they could, in turn, take care of the kids. Community was discussed one time with a focus on decision-making: “When I consider what to do, I never want to

stress taxpayers.” The school board was also mentioned one time, and the discussion was around the fact the school board decided on the 4-day week, and they were not welcoming of dissention.

The last theme was leading, and the corresponding codes were communication, conflict, and reflect/learn. All of the codes were equally represented under the scope of Research Question 2. Communication was a factor in that F1 explained that sometimes decisions are hard for people to accept because they do not understand all of the pieces behind the choice, so he tried to impress on others that “people need to listen and talk and have sincere conversations.” His mention of conflict included commentary about how people receive information about decisions being made at the district level, but that information does not always match the reality, which can be a stumbling block. Reflect/learn was included because as part of F1’s decision-making process, he said he has learned over time to “be proactive, not reactive” to the district needs. Table 21 exemplifies the breakdown of the codes and themes for Research Question 2.

**Table 21***Factional Codes/Themes for Research Question 2*

Themes	Codes	RQ2
		F1
School Business	Finances	6
	Facilities	3
	Planning	1
Decision-making	Trust	2
	Students	3
	Faculty/Staff	2
	Community	1
	School Board	1
Leading	Communication	1
	Conflict	1
	Support/Serve	0
	Reflect/Learn	1

***Power Structure: Sanctioning***

Research Question 2 was this: How do Missouri superintendents approach decision-making? There were three themes and eight codes pertaining to this research question that were yielded by the interviews with the two Sanctioning superintendents. The themes were decision-making, managing, and vision/mission.

Decision-making had three codes (community, kids, and self-action) related to it in the scope of Research Question 2. Community was mentioned three times by each superintendent. S1 said that his big themes that directed his decision-making came from the community and the feedback that they provide; he later repeated the sentiment when he said, “we operate in the context of the community.” S2 said that decisions, especially big ones, went to the community after they are vetted by the small groups on teams at the district level. He also said, “No matter what, they (community) are included in the

process of decision-making,” and he was always cognizant of the community traditions when he was considering changes and making district-level choices. Kids were mentioned by both superintendents, and they echoed the sentiment that their respective decision-making was kid focused. Self-action was only mentioned by S1, and he explained that he had a continuum of decision-making that he practiced. He said, “sometimes I’m going to make the decision...I’m just going to make it because it is my call, and people will see what types of decisions those are.” He went on to explain that snow days fall into that category and sometimes dismissing faculty/staff is in that category.

Managing was the second theme that contributed to Research Question 2. Hire/fire and operations were the included codes, but they were only mentioned by S1, not S2. S2 admitted that he had to get rid of people because he thought they were in the wrong positions and they were hindering student achievement, and he admitted that he made those decisions because “sometimes we just don’t want them in the profession.” Regarding operations, S2 stated, “I work with the board to make the best possible decisions to move the district forward and provide quality education.”

Vision/mission was the last theme. The three included codes were plan/prep, collaboration, and communication. Plan/prep was mentioned by both superintendents. S1 said that while he is deciding on a course of action, he works to gather data to generate themes and strategies, then he uses those to create action steps for the district. Conversely, S2 said he liked to be the idea generator and turn others loose to make them something solid for the district. Collaboration and Communication were only mentioned by S2 in the frame of how he specifically approached decision-making. He stated, “when

making a decision, the first people I go to are my leadership team. It has my principals, special ed director, and counselors.” He also said that he wanted the faculty and staff to communicate around decisions to give them a stake in the matter. Table 22 shows the codes and themes used to populate the data for Research Question 2.

**Table 22**

*Sanctioning Codes/Themes for Research Question 2*

Themes	Codes	RQ2	
		S1	S2
Decision-making	Experience	0	0
	Community	3	3
	School Board	0	0
	Kids	2	2
	Delegating	0	0
	Support/Trust	0	0
	Self-Action	4	0
Managing	Hire/Fire	2	0
	Money/Assets	0	0
	Physical Presence	0	0
	Operations	2	0
Vision/Mission	Plan/Prep	1	1
	Collaboration	0	4
	Communication	0	2

***Power Structure: Status Congruent***

Research Question 2 was this: How do Missouri superintendents approach decision-making? The Status Congruent superintendents’ interviews had four themes and 11 codes relevant to Research Question 2. The included themes were growth, decision-making, managing, and leading.

Growth had two codes, namely trust and judgement. Trust was mentioned by SC1, but not by SC2. SC1 said, “Sometimes you have to make hard decisions and you

spend some of your chips, you just have to hope that you put a lot of chips in your pocket early on.” SC2 discussed judgement, but SC1 did not include that in her discussion about decision-making. SC2 said, “sometimes I feel that a collaborative decision was not best, but I have to use my professional judgment to realize when it is something to fight,” and he went on to explain that if the choice is not illegal or immoral, he trusts in his team to come to a consensus around decision-making.

The next theme was decision-making, and it included the following six codes: community, collaboration, students, faculty/staff, school board, and data. Community was mentioned twice by SC1 and once by SC2. SC1 said, “community influences by decision-making a lot...it’s their kids, their school, and their money”; she went on to explain that “to make good choices, knowing the community climate and culture is crucial.” SC2 said that he is “always trying to think about how our decisions impact the neighborhoods and the neighborhoods around the schools and property lines.” Collaboration was the most mentioned code in both Status Congruent interviews. SC1 admitted that “nothing happens in isolation; from operational all the way to high level curriculum, everything has a ripple, so I have to know before choosing a course of action.” SC1 also said, “my default is including others in decision-making,” and she described her decision-making as collaborative later in the interview. SC2 explained that he had been frustrated with collaborative decision-making because it can be slow and his stance was not always the winning choice, but he said, “I always get wise counsel before I determine what to do.” He said his leadership style was “collaborative coaching.” Students were a focal point for SC1 and SC2 as factors in decision-making. SC1 stated, “Ultimately, decision-making has to come back to students.” She went on to explain that

she filtered every decision using the three following ideas: student safety, student learning, and efficiency/effectiveness. SC2 discussed his return to what is best for students when he is faced with a decision; he said, “I try to always tie everything back to what’s the impact on students.” Faculty/staff was discussed by SC1 in the capacity of decision-making approaches, but SC2 did not discuss this code. Decisions about teacher evaluations was what SC1 mentioned in the interview, and she explained that she was currently addressing those concerns, so it was on her mind. She was looking to make adjustments, but she was waiting to involve teachers in the process. The school board was also discussed by SC1 and not by SC2 in the context of Research Question 2. SC1 explained that prior to COVID-19, the board went along more easily with decisions; she said, “They were not always a rubber stamp board, but we pulled together.” She mentioned that after the 2021 school year, the board was not as agreeable. Data were explored by SC2, but not by SC1, regarding decision-making. SC2 stated, “Within the context of students, I look at the data available to help make the decision.”

The third contributing theme was managing. The two codes included were policy and directing. Directing was mentioned by SC1 and SC2. SC1 explained that “once a decision is made, we are all moving forward.” SC2 commented that the board decides about policy, but he keeps them to that realm as much as possible regarding decisions. Policy was mentioned by SC1 only in the sense that she had to make sure any decisions “fly within policy.” SC2 expanded on his previous comments by saying, “Policy is the biggest way the board influences my decision-making.”

Leading was the final theme, and it was included because SC1 discussed communication in the frame of Research Question 2. She stated, “We try to make

decisions as public as possible.” The codes and themes that comprised the data to address Research Question 2 can be found in Table 23.

**Table 23**

*Status Congruent Codes/Themes for Research Question 2*

Themes	Codes	RQ2	
		SC1	SC2
Growth	Learning	0	0
	Conflict	0	0
	Trust	1	0
	Judgement	1	1
Decision-making	Community	2	1
	Collaboration	5	4
	Students	2	3
	Faculty/Staff	1	0
	School Board	2	0
	Data	0	1
Managing	Finances	0	0
	Policy	1	1
	Balance	0	0
	Directing	1	1
Leading	Informing	0	0
	Relationships	0	0
	Communication	1	0

**Research Question 3**

Research Question 3 was this: How do power distribution models alter or maintain superintendents’ approaches? Seven superintendents contributed to the information gathered for the research questions; this information was gleaned from 11 interview questions that were asked to each superintendent (see Appendix A). Their demographics can be found in the Participants section in Chapter Four. With consideration to Research Question 3, there were four themes and nine codes from the

Dominated interviews, two themes and seven codes from the Factional interview, two themes and seven codes from the Sanctioning interviews, and four themes and 12 codes from the Status Congruent interviews.

***Power Structure: Dominated***

Research Question 3 was this: How do power distribution models alter or maintain superintendents' approaches? The following codes and themes contributed to Research Question 3. See sections Research Question 1 and Research Question 2 in Chapter Four for information about those focus areas. Interviews conducted with superintendents D1 and D2 yielded the following themes: decision-making, serving, leading, and managing.

Decision-making was made up of the following codes: trust, collaboration, and board action. Regarding trust, D1 said she had to make adjustments to her process because she learned how important it is to “strike a balance between board and community.” D2 had to pivot from giving information to the board that he felt they needed to knowing how to give “the board and faculty all the facts, even the minutiae, when big changes or choices are coming.” Collaboration came into the frame of Research Question 3 in that both superintendents said that they had to change their leadership approaches when collaboration was positive and when it was detrimental. Board action was mentioned twice by D1. She said that she quickly came to know that when the board decides, she has to own it as her decision too. D2 commented, “the more they (the board) trust me, the more I get to do,” and he went on to explain that he had shifted his approaches as trust grew because he felt they would not question him as much.

Serving was the next contributing theme, and it included two codes: community and school board. Community was exclusively mentioned by D1: “My approach depends on their values and opinions...I know what will never be up for discussion and what they will talk about a lot, and my job is to listen.” School board was mentioned by both Dominated superintendents. D1 said that she had spent a lot of time managing the relationship piece with the board “to make sure their (school board) desires and also policies are being met.” She also worked to “balance their (school board) opinions with community opinions,” and “the school board always lets [her] know when they are unhappy.” D2 recognized, “I always ultimately answer to the seven-person board...the board has final decision and authority over any circumstance.” This sentiment was repeated three more times throughout the interview, and he explained that the board was supportive of superintendent leadership regarding day-to-day operations. He went on to explain that it had taken time for him to learn how the board wanted things to be handled.

Leading was the third theme, and it included learning and reflecting as the relevant codes to Question 3. D1 said that she sometimes had to “reset, assess, and learn to make things move along in the district.” D2 said he had put a lot of energy into learning who knew what to determine when to pivot and how to best approach issues in the district. Reflecting was a primary component to when D1 adjusted her approaches because she always wanted to make sure to do better next time, especially “after being bitten, I need to know what to do later.” D2 discussed “no-go zones,” and how he had learned there are ideas, like traditions, that he can never change, even if he should want to do so.

The final theme in respect to Research Question 3 was managing. Training and mediating were the included codes. Training was mentioned by both superintendents. D1 said that she got to relax some of her practices after she trained the board on how to respond when parents contact them because it generated less negativity. D2 said he “recommends board action and training, but it is just that, a recommendation.” Mediating was mentioned by D1: “I have learned never to decide until the board weighs in.” Reoccurrences of themes and codes for Research Question 3 are presented in Table 24.

**Table 24**

*Dominated Codes/Themes for Research Question 3*

Themes	Codes	Occurrences	
		D1	D2
Decision-making	Trust	1	1
	Collaboration	1	1
	Board Action	2	1
Serving	Community	3	0
	School Board	4	6
	Students	0	0
	Faculty/staff	0	0
Leading	Learning	2	1
	Reflecting	3	1
	Planning	0	0
Managing	Training	1	1
	Facilities	0	0
	Finances	0	0
	Mediating	1	0

***Power Structure: Factional***

Research Question 3 was this: How do power distribution models alter or maintain superintendents’ approaches? The codes and themes explored in this section contributed to Research Question 3. See sections Research Question 1 and Research

Question 2 in Chapter Four for information about those focus areas. The interview with the singular Factional superintendent generated the themes decision-making and leading.

Decision-making had the following four contributing codes: trust, students, community, and school board. Trust dictated how F1 approached leadership and decision-making because “right now, there is a huge lack of trust between the school district and the community,” which made him approach situations with more intentionality and care than he might otherwise. Regarding students, he went on to explain that the community and board cared about kids, but they were suspicious, and he allowed for that in his approach. Community came into play for Research Question 3 because F1 said, “There are so many different dynamics, I have to deal with those folks in different ways on different areas.” The school board was the most common code. F1 mentioned it eight times. F1 stated, “we (district) have medical professionals on the board that the others won’t challenge,” so he worked with the group, as a whole, with consideration to the subgroup. This was highlighted during COVID-19, and the pandemic made him change a lot of his practices. He admitted that previously, in another district, he had board diversity and that made moving forward easier. He had learned to give the board the facts, and sometimes they went his way and other times they did not.

Leading was the second and final theme that contributed to Research Question 3. It included the three following codes: communication, conflict, and reflect/learn. Conflict was coded six times, which was the most within this theme. He said, “The board and I have disagreements. We have to work through some of the problems. In the end, we play for the same team.” He mentioned later that he and the board “knock heads, but they are all doing what is best for kids.” He said he had learned the hard way that the community

distrusted the board and the school, so he had to address that because it generated lack of trust and more conflict. He revisited that COVID-19 created conflict among the board members. Table 25 presents the full scope of how F1 spoke to Research Question 3.

**Table 25**

*Factional Codes/Themes for Research Question 3*

Themes	Codes	RQ3
		F1
School Business	Finances	0
	Facilities	0
	Planning	0
Decision-making	Trust	1
	Students	1
	Faculty/Staff	0
	Community	4
	School Board	8
Leading	Communication	2
	Conflict	6
	Support/Serve	0
	Reflect/Learn	1

***Power Structure: Sanctioning***

Research Question 3 was this: How do power distribution models alter or maintain superintendents’ approaches? The codes and themes explained and exemplified in this section only relate to Research Question 3. See sections Research Question 1 and Research Question 2 in Chapter Four for information about those focus areas. There were two Sanctioning superintendents who were interviewed, and from those interviews, the following two themes were yielded: decision-making and vision/mission.

Decision-making had four codes, including community, school board, kids, and support/trust. School board was the most mentioned by S1 and S2 with nine and 16

occurrences, respectively. S1 said that when he started, the school board spent an hour telling him about all the things the previous superintendent did that they did not like, so that helped form his approach in the district. He also recognized that every board election can cause radical changes in the way things are done. He said that this was often frustrating, and he was especially frustrated with the previous board president, but that was addressed when board reorganization happened because the other members knew of the conflict. He said currently there were only two people left who hired him, and up until April or May of 2021, the board was great, but since then they had gone their own way, so he was adjusting. He did say, however, "I've been pretty fortunate, and overall had a pretty supportive board." S2 said that when he started, the board members opened their arms to him, and COVID-19 really helped him gain trust, which had bought him more autonomy to lead. He said they were eager to see what else he could do after the 2021 school year was a success, despite COVID-19. He felt fortunate because the board recognized that he needed to lead, and they recognized him as the leader and asked him for and respected his recommendations. He said, "they are not in charge of things, but they are an advisory board, and they are someone to bounce ideas off of," and he said, "they are your support and advisory group, that's how the system is supposed to work." He went on to say that the board asked questions if they disagreed, and he and the board talked through them, but they were always mutually supportive in public because they needed to be seen as a cohesive entity. Support/trust was mentioned by S1 and S2. S1 said that the board's support and trust had ups and downs, and he had to prepare for those as best as possible and still uphold his goals and philosophies. S2 said that he felt he had the board's complete trust regarding doing what was best for kids and maintained his

approach around that idea. Kids and community were only mentioned by S2. S2 said that he knows where there was a disconnect between himself and the board; things can fall apart and that hurts kids, so he works on his relationship with the board to maintain his course. He said the community's traditions and pride had developed his approach during his time there. He went on to explain that the community treated the school as the nucleus of their town, which was not the case in bigger districts, so he must respect that fact in his leadership and decision-making.

Vision/mission was the last theme. Plan/prep and communication were the codes included. Plan/prep was discussed only by S1, and he said that throughout his time with the district, the community had engaged with the process around the iteration of their strategic plan, which had made his job easier moving forward. Communication was mentioned eight times by S1 and three times by S2. The message S1 conveyed was that communication changes when the board changes because everyone has a different communication preference. His communication morphed from his beginning in the district in that he primarily communicated with the board president now. One approach that he had maintained was that he "operates on a no surprise basis," and he uses the community to get feedback and develop his themes for his approaches. S2 said that he was proud that the board asks for clarification, instead of reacting negatively, when they hear something that they do not like. He knew other superintendents do not get that courtesy in different districts. S2 also stated that he primarily communicated with the board president now just to filter information, but his initial approach was to "communicate with all members to keep them close and let them know what is going on." Table 26 shows the codes and themes that were related to Research Question 3.

**Table 26***Sanctioning Codes/Themes for Research Question 3*

Themes	Codes	RQ3	
		S1	S2
Decision-making			
	Experience	0	0
	Community	0	5
	School Board	9	16
	Kids	0	1
	Delegating	0	0
	Support/Trust	2	2
	Self-Action	0	0
Managing			
	Hire/Fire	0	0
	Money/Assets	0	0
	Physical Presence	0	0
	Operations	0	0
Vision/Mission			
	Plan/Prep	2	0
	Collaboration	1	0
	Communication	8	3

***Power Structure: Status Congruent***

Research Question 3 was this: How do power distribution models alter or maintain superintendents' approaches? Included in this section are codes and themes aligned with Research Question 3. In Chapter Four, see sections Research Question 1 and Research Question 2 for information about those focus areas. Two Status Congruent superintendents were interviewed to gather data. Four themes were gleaned from the interviews, as follows: growth, decision-making, managing, and leading.

Growth was comprised of four codes, including learning, conflict, trust, and judgement. Learning only appeared in SC1's interview. SC1 said, "Like a good educator, [she] keeps changing habits." Conflict was included by SC1 and SC2, but it was repeated four times by SC1. She explained that COVID-19 generated a lot of conflict among the

board members in the 2021 school year. She saw the polarization among the board members, so she had changed her approaches, but she hoped the changes were not permanent because prior to COVID-19, the board and she worked well together and there was little turbulence. SC2 said that when he disagreed with his team or group, he got frustrated, but he was careful to stay static in his approaches, so people knew what to expect from him. Trust was mentioned by SC1 four times. She said there was great trust before COVID-19, but now there is a lot of questioning going on, so she had altered her approaches because the board had moved to a trust, but verify mode of operations. SC2 admitted that he got a lot of things done that a newer administrator would not because he had been with them 12 years and they trusted what he told them. SC1 was the only one to mention judgement in the scope of Research Question 3. She said that her start at the district was very positive. She went on to say that COVID-19 strained the relationships between the board, the community, and herself, so she was as frustrated as she had ever been in her 30 years of experience.

Decision-making was the second theme, and it included only school board as a contributing code. SC1 said, "Sometimes they (school board) are behind the hard choices, and sometimes they take heat from the community alongside you." SC1 stated that in the beginning the board really pulled for her, but with new members she had to adjust because "suddenly they want to be way more involved." SC2 said he operated under the recognition that the board makes policy, and he kept that simple.

Managing was the next theme. There were four contributing codes, as follows: finances, policy, balance, and directing. Finances and directing were the most minimal codes; they were only mentioned once by SC1. About finances, she said that she was the

guardian, but she kept in mind that the board votes and allocates the primary budget. As for directing, SC1 said that the current board wanted to revamp the district's strategic plan, so she was working to direct them to do things that were good for kids and uphold core values. She recognized that this push was due to the number of new board members that were recently elected. Policy and balance were mentioned by SC1 and SC2. About policy, SC1 stated, "Big pictures things, like policy, are set by the board, but managed by me." SC2 commented, "Obviously, board sets policy, so I have to live within it." SC1's perspective on balance regarding her approaches was "There is a balance between top-down board, but not overly involved. I think there is a nice balance here." SC2 said, "I'm less swayed by the board than I might have been earlier in my career, but I maintain balance for myself professionally."

The last theme was leading, and it had the three following codes: informing, relationships, and communication. Informing was included by SC1 and SC2. SC1 said that she viewed herself as a liaison to the board, and she framed her communication around that. SC2 said, "My position is to keep the board informed...I provide information, clarification, and examples." Both superintendents mentioned relationships in context with how they affected their approaches. SC1 said that she was adapting some approaches because of the new division, but some were staying because they still respected each other, and she still felt like she knew them. SC2's said he had a professional relationship with the board, and they had really grown together, so his approaches had changed. Communication was only mentioned by SC1. She said when she started the board was highly communicative, but it had ebbed and flowed since then, so she tried to stay current with their expectations, which meant communicating with the

board president now. She said she definitely communicated more in this district than she did in any of her previous districts because she learned the board and community liked to be informed. Table 27 provides the scope of how many times each code and theme were repeated for Research Question 3.

**Table 27**

*Status Congruent Codes/Themes for Research Question 3*

Themes	Codes	RQ3	
		SC1	SC2
Growth	Learning	1	0
	Conflict	4	1
	Trust	4	2
	Judgement	4	0
Decision-making	Community	0	0
	Collaboration	0	0
	Students	0	0
	Faculty/Staff	0	0
	School Board	7	2
	Data	0	0
Managing	Finances	1	0
	Policy	1	2
	Balance	1	1
	Directing	1	0
Leading	Informing	2	2
	Relationships	2	2
	Communication	4	0

**Summary**

This chapter explored the interview coding and theming for the seven superintendents within the four power structures (Dominated, Factional, Sanctioning, and Status Congruent) who were randomly chosen to participate in this study. Contributions from each superintendent were dissected and organized within the four respective power

structures. Note that the Factional power structure only had one superintendent because there were no other superintendents that met the criteria for factional power structures based on the survey (Appendix B). Triangulation of data, when possible, was established by assessing schools' social media posts, policies, and member checking, as presented in Appendix E. The analysis of interview data was explored and organized by power structure, and each theme was broken into codes with corresponding explanation and examples. The interview information was further reported out in the included tables that relay the number of occurrences for each code within each theme. Additionally, each power structure, theme, and code was explored in the context of the three research questions. Examples were provided to support the alignment between code, theme, and research question.

Chapter Five synthesized the findings from this study, offered conclusions framed by the research questions, and recommended further research within the realm of the study. Note that Chapter Five included the researcher's opinions based on the interview experiences, the coding processes, and the relevant literature baseline information that were collected throughout the dissertation process.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Introduction

This study assessed Missouri public school superintendents' feelings about their leadership effectiveness in relation to the existent power structures in their school districts, and it explored how the power structures related to their decision-making. Seven superintendents were interviewed from the four power structures (Dominated, Factional, Sanctioning, Status Congruent) established by McCarty and Ramsey (1971) in their research around power distribution in school systems. The concept of leadership was further refined through the lens of Burns' (1978) theories about transformational and transactional leadership.

The participants in this study were from rural, suburban, and city schools. Each power structure had two corresponding superintendents who were interviewed, except for the Factional power structure because there was only one respondent to the survey (Appendix B) who was categorized as Factional based on the survey's key (Appendix D). The interview questions were aligned with the research questions and framed with an interview protocol (see Appendix A). There was one central question and three research questions:

Central Question: How do superintendents feel about their leadership effectiveness in the context of district power structures?

Research Question 1: How do Missouri superintendents approach leadership?

Research Question 2: How do Missouri superintendents approach decision-making?

Research Question 3: How do power distribution models alter or maintain superintendents' approaches?

The purpose of this qualitative narrative phenomenological study was to discover how the structure of power in a school district led Missouri superintendents' leadership styles and feelings of effectiveness in their roles as district leaders. Results and outcomes, discussion of findings, implications for superintendents, and suggestions for further research were explored in Chapter Five.

## **Results and Outcomes**

This study had one central question and three related research questions. These questions addressed feelings of leadership effectiveness in relation to district power structures, which was an identified gap in the research. By combining the work of McCarty and Ramsey (1971) and Burns (1978), new findings around what makes a leader feel effective were made possible. Bringing together these two theories to frame this work provided a new lens through which to view leadership and decision-making, thereby adding to the available research and information regarding what affects superintendents' roles in their districts.

### ***Central Research Question***

The central research question was this: How do superintendents feel about their leadership effectiveness in the context of district power structures? This question was the umbrella for Research Questions 1, 2, and 3. The seven participating superintendents, whose demographic specifications were outlined in Chapter Four under the section Participants, engaged in interviews that spanned 20 to 40 minutes, depending on how lengthy their responses were. The interviews were transcribed and coded, then themes

were generated. The answers to the research questions, as expounded upon in the following sections, were gleaned from the commonalities between the two superintendents in each singular power structure. The exception to this was for the Factional power structure because there was only one school that met the criterion for that power structure.

### ***Research Question 1***

Research question 1 was this: How do Missouri superintendents approach leadership?

The interviews of the Dominated superintendents yielded terms that indicated that Dominated superintendents were primarily transformational in their leadership approaches; they reported working with groups, involving stakeholders, building relationships, and planning for short and long terms in the district, all of which align with Burns' (1978) concepts of transformational leadership, as presented in this study's Review of Related Literature. The Dominated superintendents reported efforts to spend time in the community and with external stakeholders to gain perspective. The singular Factional superintendent practiced transformational (Burns, 1978) concepts, as reported in his interview: focusing on the future, building trust, and caring for people like family. However, the Factional superintendent reported that he heavily relied on transactional (Burns, 1978) leadership in his reports about finances and facilities; the Factional superintendent used budget numbers to measure success of his decision-making. Factional was self-described as "supportive," regarding his leadership style. His time was spent with community members and with board members to learn their expectations and needs. The board was recognized as the core team. Sanctioning superintendents indicated

they were transformational in that they looked to implement programs and spend time with internal stakeholders. Books influenced their leadership, and passions for learning were deemed important. *Organizers* was the word both Sanctioning superintendents used to describe their roles. Status Congruent superintendents were collaborative and transformational in that they mentioned mentors and team appreciation. They listened and communicated in timely fashions, as part of their personal professional goals. They “celebrate the good and own the bad.”

### ***Research Question 2***

Research Question 2 was this: Missouri superintendents approach decision-making? By interviewing superintendents, it was determined that the Dominated superintendents made decisions based on what was best for kids, but they also focused on addressing pressing needs within the frame of the community’s norms and values. Dominated superintendents recognized the school boards as the supreme authorities in their respective interviews. The Factional superintendent considered budget when making choices, and he emphasized the importance of doing what was promised to build trust. F1 said everything radiated from the board, and decisions were made accordingly. The Sanctioning superintendents focused on kids and growth, and they relied on the established process and data to make decisions. They spent time with district teams and the board to help make sound choices. Status Congruent superintendents described themselves as “collaborative,” and they used committees and stakeholders to influence their decision-making. They tied everything back to kids and they were data driven.

### ***Research Question 3***

Research Question 3 was this: How do power distribution models alter or maintain superintendents' approaches? Dominated superintendents' approaches were directed by the board and by the community; they recognized the board as the authority and saw the community reflected in the board. Dominated superintendents used the board to check their course of action before making changes or making choices public. The Factional superintendent recognized that there was a group of medical professionals who stood strong and were not often challenged in his district, and effort was exerted to counter the lack of trust between the district and community. F1's personal opinions were kept private in the hopes of building trust and maintaining leadership. Sanctioning superintendents reported using feedback to determine their approaches to decision-making and leadership. They recognized the evolution that occurs when new people, especially new board members, join the district. They practiced flexibility, but they focused on always doing what they promised to build trust in them as the leaders. The Status Congruent superintendents lived within policy, and they depended on the board to address the big picture, but they handled the daily issues. They were proponents of transparent approaches, and professionalism was paramount to their leadership practices.

### **Discussion of Findings**

A qualitative phenomenological narrative study was chosen to understand superintendents' feelings around their leadership and decision-making within the frames of the existing power structures in their respective districts. Understanding the deep connections and true feelings that Missouri school superintendents have around their leadership capacities was well supported by qualitative work because it allowed for

voice, tone, and expressions to enhance and clarify the superintendents' words when answering the interview questions, thus providing richer data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This would not have been possible in a quantitative study because the nature of quantitative is numbers based and sterile. All seven superintendents included in the scope of this study brought their unique backgrounds and experiences to the process, and consideration to those differences made the similarities more interesting because there was a preconceived notion that similar power structures would include similar locations and similar educational leaders. This was not the case, which was exemplified in the size differences and personal experiences and philosophies that existed in each district within a singular power structure frame; for example, S1 and S2 had a difference of 19 years' experience between them, S1 served the largest district in the study, and S2 served the second smallest district in the study. S1 was very serious and to-the-point, yet S2 was jovial and talkative; however, the inner workings of their districts regarding the board and the community both fell squarely into the Sanctioning power structure, as described by McCarty and Ramsey (1971). These experiences and more intricacies were captured in the 20- to 40-minute interviews that were conducted using the preestablished Interview Protocol (Appendix A).

The findings from this qualitative phenomenological narrative study indicated that superintendents can feel successful in any district power structure (Dominated, Factional, Sanctioning, and Status Congruent) if the structure aligns with their personal philosophies, but the Status Congruent structure supports the idea of transformational and balanced leadership, which is the standard in the United States' education system and leadership (Freeborough & Patterson, 2015; Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016), due to the

implementation of data-driven decision making, professional conduct, collaborative leadership, and kid-centered practices. Sanctioning was the only other power structure to mention data in the scope of their decision-making, but they again deferred to the community for input, whereas the Status Congruent schools got feedback from multiple stakeholders and did not report being swayed solely by the community. Dominated included concepts of community and board balance and mentioned community more than students in their leadership approaches and decision-making. The Dominated districts in Missouri used the school board as their first point of contact, and they discussed the board in terms of being their authority, which was not mentioned by the Status Congruent districts. SC1 and SC2 reported that they had a collaborative relationship with their boards, and their boards stick to policy and big picture.

Limitations of this study included the following:

- Time the interviews took.
- Truth in superintendents' survey and interview responses.
- Access to superintendents and their school districts' data.
- Bias in superintendent responses to the survey and interview questions.
- Self-reported data and classifications may be unintentionally biased when reported by the superintendents.
- Consistency in interview responses varied due to the participants' personalities and preferences.
- Consistencies in interviews and analysis were based on participants' depths in answering.

- Access to superintendents was expanded due to use of video platform (ZOOM, Google Meets).
- Personal unintentional bias due to connection or lack thereof with the interview participants.
- Language used by the researcher and the participants had the potential not to mirror in meanings.
- Access to districts' documents was limited to and determined by the superintendent and the available district policies.

Interviewing superintendents from all four power structures was attainable, but there was only one Factional superintendent because there were no other superintendents who took the survey who met the criteria for Factional. All Missouri superintendents were asked to complete the survey and participate, but only 33 chose to participate in the interview process. Among those 33, the chosen participants were picked using Randomizer.org.

Reports of happiness and fulfillment from the superintendents came from the Dominated and the Sanctioning districts. These power structures represent two dramatically different sides: Dominated superintendents reported being dependent on the board and recognizing them as the authority and Sanctioning superintendents reported having more control in the relationship with the board and recognizing them as a soundboard, not an authority. This led the researcher to believe that the defined relationships lead to happiness because the superintendents from the Dominated and Sanctioning districts knew where they stood with their respective boards and spent less time managing and mediating board relationships. Dominated superintendents know to

always check with the board before moving forward, and Sanctioning superintendents know that they can make decisions and be supported by the board. The Status Congruent and Factional school districts do business with their boards in more uncertain terms, which can cause extreme undue strain and thereby negativity, depending on the turbulence prior to the shifts (Tekniepe, 2015; Webner et al., 2017). The leaders in those districts are often redefining their standing with the board and the community while learning their expectations for communication and approaches on a continuous basis. The Status Congruent districts, who rely on collaborative decision-making, transition with more confidence than the Factional district because there are always people remaining in the district who have business knowledge to help the district continue to move forward. As established by Shapiro and Stefkovich (2016), shared decision-making leads to investment among all levels of stakeholders and maintains school progress, even if the progress slows.

Three of the four power structures mentioned conflict throughout the interview process. Factional reported the most conflict in his interview, followed by Sanctioning. Dominated did not mention conflict in the interview. Conflict is a natural part of leadership and handling the conflict led to feelings of satisfaction for the Status Congruent superintendents. Conflict was sometimes discussed regarding parents or community members, but it was most commonly discussed referencing school boards. School board conflict included conflict among the board members, between the board and the superintendent, and between the board and the community. The last bond that the Factional district tried to pass “failed miserably,” and the feelings around that were that the community did not trust that the school would spend the money honorably. When

trust is not established or when it falters, it may lead to shifts in power and micromanagement, which can thereby lead to superintendent dissatisfaction (Bridges et al., 2019; Holmen, 2016) In the Status Congruent districts, superintendents reported that the board may disagree with them in private, but typically stood with them in public, which is essential for the community to trust in the school as a whole, and that trust can free the superintendent and the school board to make broad changes and ask for big support to better the school over time (Beckham & Willis, 2019; Black, 2009). The same was mentioned by the Sanctioning districts; they reported that the board would often ask questions about occurrences in meetings, via email, or through text, but would stay united in the public eye.

The Status Congruent and the Sanctioning superintendents felt they had more support from their communities for district efforts and spending. However, in agreement with Hoyle et al. (2005), the Sanctioning superintendents' increased power yielded uncertainty and more conflict than the Status Congruent districts expressed. Feelings and reports of trust were included by all seven superintendents, but the Status Congruent and the Sanctioning superintendents reported that they felt confident in the levels of trust they had with the faculty, staff, and board, and they recognized their communities as supportive. This was exemplified in the fact that both power structures included schools that had bonds pass in 2020 or 2021; both Status Congruent schools had bonds pass with more than 78% approval. The Dominated and Factional superintendents discussed that they were always considering ways to build trust or get trust with the internal and external stakeholders. The Factional superintendent was building trust in hopes of getting a bond passed, even though the last one failed, and the Dominated superintendents did

not mention bond potentials. Considering all four power structures and their respective superintendents, Status Congruent had the most positive feelings reported around the role of superintendent; however, all the superintendents from the four power structures (Dominated, Factional, Sanctioning, and Status Congruent) had positive aspects to their positions. Balance in the power and influence through the scope of mutually beneficial decision-making leads to success in schools (Holmen, 2016; LaMonte & Delagardelle, 2009); Status Congruent, above the other power structures, offers that balance, and the results of this study supported that ideal.

### ***Leadership Styles***

In the interview process with all seven participants, the goal was to assess their approaches to leadership and decision-making, then determine how their leadership styles were supported within their respective districts. The superintendents were divided using the four power structures (Dominated, Factional, Sanctioning, and Status Congruent) and then their leadership was framed using the works of Burns (1978) and Bass (1990) to determine how their individual approaches fit within the concepts of transactional and transformational leadership.

Considering leadership styles, Status Congruent presented the most attributes that were consistent with transformational leaders. They discussed district teams that include internal stakeholders from teachers to counselors to building administrators, and they focused on collaboration and coaching as their self-described leadership approaches. SC1 discussed the balance in her district and celebrated the level of respect between the community and the school board, which extended to the district. The same respect and

collective positivity were explained by SC2 when he delved into the bond that passed in April 2021, and SC1 also had a bond pass in the spring of 2021.

Sanctioning districts discussed district leadership teams and how they play roles in their decision-making, which aligns with transformational leadership (Burns, 1978), but they also discussed finances and facilities to greater degrees than the Status Congruent superintendents. S1 discussed programs and finances in depth and described his management of the budget as a “key duty,” and S2 explained that finances and budget and managing people were key to his role; these ideas align with transactional leadership. Sanctioning represented both leadership styles in capacities that make it difficult to say their leadership styles are one more than the other.

The Dominated districts both described more financial and management components to their approaches, compared to the other power structures, which falls into transactional leadership due to the managerial functions that those components represent (Burns, 1978). D1 discussed her work to get the school district finances in healthy conditions, and D2 explained that he determined success based on financial outcomes. Neither mentioned teams in the scopes of their leadership, which was an established component to transformational leadership (Burns, 1978). They discussed being servant leaders, however, in the capacities that were highly visible in the community and intentional in their communication with external stakeholders when they attend as many community events or meetings as possible. Living in the community was also a focus for both Dominated leaders. To categorize them, they meet more transactional approaches due to the repeated focus on finances and management, which are components to

transactional leadership (Bass, 1990; Burns, 1978), but they also incorporate transformational approaches, as previously mentioned.

The Factional district discussed communication, and he mentioned reaching out to principals to discuss ideas, which is transformational in nature (Burns, 1978). F1 focused on respecting the board and communicating with the board members about needs. He worked to gain trust with all stakeholders in the district, so he tried to overcommunicate and follow through with plans to create a foundation on which trust could be built. The faction that existed in the district was at the time this study was conducted made of medical personnel, which carried more meaning during the COVID-19 pandemic than it might have during other times. He recognized that few moved against the medical professionals on the school board, so he focused on giving the facts and managing the expectations and relationships as well as possible. His comments about leadership were not as definitive as those of the other participants. Transformational and transactional leadership were equally present in F1's responses, but neither was overtly strong.

### ***Decision-Making***

Decision-making is closely linked with leadership and with power distribution, as established by McCarty and Ramsey (1971). If a superintendent feels a decision should be made definitively, like S1 explained, the power structure in place must support that to maintain the leadership style and philosophies. The Sanctioning power structure allows for the most individual decision-making among school leaders, and S1 and S2 both appreciated that freedom. However, the Sanctioning superintendents conversely consulted their district and building teams when the decision allowed for it regarding time.

Overall, the participating superintendents described their decision-making as collaborative, which was considered best practice by Curry et al. (2018). The Factional superintendent was the outlier in that he described his decision-making as student focused and proactive, not reactive, with focus on finances. SC1 and SC2 used the terms collaborative and collaborative coaching, respectively, and they felt that trusting others to make decisions was key in the district decision-making process. The Dominated superintendents said they were collaborative, but they deferred to their school boards as the “ultimate authority.” Each of the power structures support different degrees of decision-making with the common factor being that they include others in the process on a conditional basis, which aligned with the work from Shapiro and Stefkovich (2016); the conditions are set by the district power distribution models, as explored by McCarty and Ramsey (1971).

### ***Power Structure Alignment***

The Factional school district aligned to the defined power structures with fidelity. F1 referenced the faction in his district without being prompted or asked, and he recognized that district decisions follow that faction because few people are willing to stand against them. This follows the definition as established by McCarty and Ramsey (1971).

Status Congruent districts aligned with the definition written by McCarty and Ramsey (1971). The superintendents are the advisors in those districts and the board members do not represent a group. There is a hierarchy within the board, which was made most obvious when the superintendents recognized that they primarily conversed

with the board president. SC1 and SC2 recognized that they had to adjust when new board members joined the board.

Dominated partially aligned in that D1 reported that the members of her board were long-standing, and their family members most commonly served in the past. D2 did not mention any such structure within the school board. However, in agreement with the Dominated Power Structure (McCarty & Ramsey, 1971), both superintendents said that they provided information, but the board typically went its own direction when making choices.

In the Sanctioning structure, S1 described definitive aspects of a Sanctioned district. He referenced making decisions on his own and being supported in doing so by the board; however, both Sanctioning superintendents also mentioned collaborative or team decision-making, which was not part of McCarty and Ramsey's (1971) definition. S2 reported that the board trusted him completely and knew he needed to be the leader. As McCarty and Ramsey described, Sanctioning boards follow the lead and direction of the superintendent, which was true in S1's and S2's districts.

### ***Outcome Expectations***

The researcher expected the Sanctioning power structure to make school leaders feel the most successful because it gives them the most freedom and autonomy to act (McCarty & Ramsey, 1971). After talking with the superintendents and synthesizing their messages, results indicated that Status Congruent was the most positive for school leaders. The Status Congruent leaders, as the Sanctioning leaders, recognized students are primary stakeholders, which agreed with the research conducted by Wehrkamp (2020), and further adds to their success. However, the Sanctioning school districts did not work

as closely or personally with their boards, which was recognized by Xia et al. (2020) as a negative practice. The positive feelings around leadership that come from collective decision-making echo the work Curry et al. (2018), as explained in the Review of Related Literature. Sanctioning was not the most positive because with the freedom to choose and act comes conflict when internal or external stakeholders disagree with the course of action. Status Congruent provides a collaborative platform that drives stakeholders to consensus, if not agreement, which generates less conflict, according to the conversations with participants.

It was assumed that Factional would be the most negative power structure due to the potential for discontinuous expectations for the leader. This was true based on the information collected in this study, but the most negative aspect was the lack of trust and the constant effort to gain trust to get support. As established by Khalifa et al. (2015) and Smylie et al. (2016), trust is an essential component to success for school leaders because without it, stakeholders will not support good or bad choices, thus creating negative stasis in the district and building roadblocks to leadership (Kenney, 2020). Lack of trust generates anxiety because there is potential for turbulence with each decision, and the expectations may change when the board changes. For example, F1 had a school board with “several medical professionals on it.” He had to balance their expectations against the rest of the board and the community, while always striving to build and gain trust. The lack of trust was the biggest stumbling block for F1, according to his interview responses.

## **Implications for Superintendents**

This qualitative phenomenological narrative study provided information about how decision-making and leadership approaches and district power structures make superintendents feel as leaders. If looking for a place where general satisfaction is most likely for a superintendent, a Status Congruent district is most likely to yield those circumstances, based on the conversations with the participating districts, due to the balance and dynamics supported by the community and the board in relation to leader growth and autonomy. Status Congruent districts support the inclusion of internal and external stakeholders, and the interviewed superintendents discussed how useful the approach is in making successful decisions because there is a foundation of consensus, if not agreement, that helps the community support the district even when turbulence is high. The best evidence from the interviews toward this point is that both Status Congruent school districts had bond issues pass during the 2021 school year, which was wrought with issues related to COVID-19. This consensus builds trust and relationships that strengthen the superintendents' efficacy levels over time with enhanced knowledge and communication, as established by Oplatka (2017). Communication and collaboration ranked the highest among leadership competencies in Velez's (2020) study, and Status Congruent districts exercise both of these, thus making the districts desirable. The expanded communication and consideration practiced by Status Congruent superintendents make the district desirable for teachers and administrators because they will inherently get more input than in districts with other power structures; however, the Sanctioning superintendents in this study made points to include their internal stakeholders in decision-making by way of creating leadership teams, but that was

atypical of Sanctioning leaders as they were defined by McCarty and Ramsey (1971).

Dominated and Factional participants mentioned talking with principals and being visible and accessible for people to communicate with them, but none of them included information about putting teachers, administrators, or others on teams to build efficacy in decision-making.

Factional school districts led to lesser feelings of success due to the conflict and the feelings of frustration reported regarding board members against whom others will not stand because of the struggles to gain trust, which is essential for school leader success (Khalifa et al., 2015; Smylie et al., 2016). Trust must be had among and between stakeholder groups. The Factional superintendent works to build trust with the community and the school board in the hopes of getting to a place where the community supports the school. The Factional school district stakeholders do really seem to care about kids, and they strive for kid-centered decision-making, they just do not have the mutual trust needed for autonomy to act. For Factional leaders, proving themselves starts anew when new factions come into power, so the progress is slow.

More important, however, is that the superintendent know their own leadership styles and philosophies before committing to a district. The superintendent needs to understand and genuinely support the districts' functions and structure, otherwise there will be feelings of frustration and general unhappiness. Conflict is normal when working with people, but if a superintendent works within a system that suits their leadership style, they report feelings of success and happiness (Ford & Ihrke, 2016). This was a focal point for S1 and SC1. They commented that being genuine in the district is essential for their success. In that frame, keeping superintendents in jobs long term is important to

the success of school because continuity is important to plan and establish growth. For superintendents or aspiring superintendents, they need to be aware of the power structure and the inner workings of the district before taking the position, and they need to make sure their philosophies match because changing district philosophies is difficult under the best circumstances, and that may lead to turnover or unhappiness (Ford & Ihrke, 2015). In that case, superintendents are likely to leave in search of a better fit, which disrupts district progress (Hill & Jochim, 2018; Przybylski et al., 2018). This is not ideal for internal or external stakeholders in the district of origin.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

The scope and reach of this qualitative phenomenological narrative study left avenues for other researchers to expand and expound upon the results yielded. To further build on this study, researchers could ask the superintendents to rank their effectiveness using a Likert scale, then they could ask the corresponding school board presidents to rank their superintendents' effectiveness for comparison. This could be used in a mixed methods study along with the interviews to gain different perspectives on leadership effectiveness in relation to the power structures. Researchers may compare the interview data to the schools' Continuous School Improvement Plan-related data to assess effectiveness of the district in relation to the superintendents' feelings of effectiveness.

Focus on socioeconomics or geographical location is also suggested for further research because it could provide researchers with the opportunity to see if location and power structure are correlated regarding how effective superintendents feel as leaders. This would provide an additional layer for dialogue around what makes leaders feel effective and how they approach leadership and decision-making. Along with

socioeconomics, researchers may consider the background of the superintendent in comparison with their current position to further examine the agreement between the leaders and their districts.

## **Conclusions**

This qualitative phenomenological narrative study set out to fill the gap in research by combining the assessment of school districts' power structures (McCarty & Ramsey, 1971) and transformation and transactional leadership theories at the theoretical frameworks, then applying the theories to assess how power dispersion makes superintendents feel as school leaders. Based on the findings gathered from this qualitative phenomenological narrative study, districts should foster policies and procedures that are collaborative in nature to generate feelings of effectiveness through relationship building and communication. Districts need to have collective and reciprocal trust, but they should not give their superintendents complete power or autonomy for long-term success as leaders.

Through that system, trust and efficacy are built, as testified by the Status Congruent superintendents primarily, as well as the Sanctioning to lesser degrees. The collaborative atmosphere supports Transformational Leadership, which is a standard for good practice in the United States (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Day et al., 2016). When bringing together the power of communication, education, and relationships, school leaders are empowered to progress districts, and the community buys into the vision, generating a positive cycle, as exemplified by SC1 and SC2. The positive feelings regarding leadership effectiveness build leadership efficacy, which leads to feelings of harmony and fulfillment, negating turnover that may otherwise occur (Hamilton, 2020;

Tekniepe, 2015; Thompson, 2014). Superintendents do need to be given the primary power for them to feel successful. They need to feel trusted and supported, which is different from having power (Xia et al., 2020). It is therefore vital for school districts and school boards to foster relationship building and collaboration between the superintendent, community, school board, and internal stakeholders to provide the best opportunities for districts to maintain leadership and uphold progress to better student learning and teacher retention through the scope of collective efficacy.

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## APPENDIX A

### Interview Protocol

#### Basic Interview Information

Time Started:            Time Ended:            Date:            Place/Format:

Interview Participant Identifier:

Interview Participant Identifier:

#### Introduction

The researcher will introduce herself and explain the purpose of the study, then she will verify that the Informed Consent is signed and that the interview participant wants to continue with the interview. The researcher will review the guards in place to ensure anonymity (the interview participant will be assigned a numeral identifier and that number will be used throughout the dissertation). Questions, if any, will be answered before the interview officially begins.

#### Opening Question

The interview participant will first be invited to talk about him/herself and include any information they feel is relevant to the study. This is meant to be an icebreaker and put the interview participant at ease.

## **Content Questions**

1. Describe your role here at (District's Name) and explain what your daily and monthly duties entail.
2. Describe the process by which you were hired and describe how that made you feel.
3. Tell me about a time you feel is the highlight of your service at (District's Name).
4. Tell me about a time you felt most frustrated in your role.
5. Explain the relationship between you and the school board as whole.

a. How has that morphed from your start with the district?

6. Explain your decision-making process in your current role.

7. Explain how the community and the school board influence your decision making.

8. Explain your leadership style.

a. What has been most influential in developing this style?

9. Tell me about the role of the community and the school board in the development of your leadership style.

10. What criterion do you use for determining whether or not a situation yielded a successful outcome?

a. How was this developed?

**Probes Used (Circle All Used)**

- Tell me more.
- I need more detail.
- Could you explain your response?
- What does \_\_\_\_\_ mean?

Additional Probes Used:

**Closing Instructions**

The researcher will thank the interview participant and answer any final questions he/she may have. The interview participant will again be assured of confidentiality in the reporting out of the study results. The researcher will explain that the results of the study, including an abstract, will be emailed to the interview participant after the study has concluded. There will be a final reminder that the interview participant may withdraw their answers from the study at any time before the study results are finalized. The interview session will end with an expression of appreciation and goodbye.

## APPENDIX B

### Survey Tool

#### Survey Instrument: School Superintendents

This survey has statements that describe your school board, your community, and you as the superintendent. Reflect on each and think of what is customary and usual, and not what is occasional or unique.

Please respond to the following statements. Rank order the possible responses by assigning “1” to the situation that best fits or is most common in your community, school board, or to your own leadership style. Assign “2” to the second most common, a “3” to the next most common, and a “4” to the response that is least like your community, school board, or leadership style. The following is an example:

A. When there is a school budget crisis or problem, the most public and vocal groups are the following:

  3   Parents and professional staff

  2   Business and farm leaders

  4   Interest groups or political parties

  1   No public or vocal concern; the problem is left to the School Board

#### Community Behaviors:

1. When critical issues develop in my school community, they are:

       Discussed and decided openly.

       Subjected to controversy by competing community groups.

       Resolved by one person or group of people.

       Not discussed.

2. My community can best be described as socioeconomically
- homogeneous
  - heterogeneous
  - changing
3. Power and influence in my community tends to be:
- Divided relatively equally.
  - Divided between two or more factions.
  - Concentrated unequally in one or two individuals or small groups.
  - Difficult or impossible to identify.
4. Which of the following best describes public concern for issues in my community?
- The same individuals and group(s) tend to get involved in all issues.
  - There tends not to be much interest or involvement regarding all issues.
  - Groups of individuals involved with educational issues generally are not involved in other community issues.
  - Groups mobilize or disappear based on specific issues.
5. Leadership in my community tends to be:
- Centered on one or two individuals.
  - Divided among the leaders of different groups.
  - Shared by a number of individuals.
  - Delegated to administrators.
6. People who use power or influence in my community could be described as:
- Persons with financial resources.

Persons linked by long-standing friendships and social relationships.

Persons who hold elected office or appointed positions.

There is little evidence of people using power or influence.

7. The following behaviors tend to best describe my community when general elections are conducted:

Candidates surface from a single community-wide leadership group.

Candidates surface from competing groups.

It is difficult to find candidates.

Candidates tend to represent specific issues across the community.

8. When general elections are conducted in my community, the results tend to be:

Predictable.

Unpredictable.

9. Elections in my community tend to be:

Uncontested with organized support for the candidate.

Contested with no apparent organized support or opposition for the candidate.

Contested with organized support and opposition for the candidate.

Uncontested with no apparent organized support for the candidate.

School Board Behaviors:

10. School board members in my school district tend to represent:

A specific group and its interests.

Broad community interests.

11. Board membership tends to be:

\_\_\_ Unstable over time with unpredictable change of members.

\_\_\_ Stable over time with predictable changes of members.

12. Power and influence on my school board tends to be:

\_\_\_ Divided equally among all board members.

\_\_\_ Divided equally between two or more factions.

\_\_\_ Concentrated unequally in one or two board members.

\_\_\_ Difficult or impossible to identify.

13. Votes on significant or critical issues tend to be:

\_\_\_ 4-3 with the same people tending to vote in the minority.

\_\_\_ 6-1 with the same people tending to vote in the minority.

\_\_\_ 6-1 with different people tending to vote in the minority.

\_\_\_ 6-1 or 4-3 but different members will vote in the minority each time.

14. When significant issues face my school board, members tend to rely on:

\_\_\_ Information and data.

\_\_\_ The opinion of influential school board or community member(s).

\_\_\_ The superintendent's recommendation.

\_\_\_ The opinion of the community groups they represent.

15. The resolution of conflict over issues by the school board can best be described as the school board:

\_\_\_ Going along with the "conventional wisdom" of the community decision-makers.

\_\_\_ Acting as a "corporate board of directors."

\_\_\_ Exposing the conflict to a "marketplace of competing interests and ideas."

\_\_\_ Relying on the “superintendent as the decision-maker.”

16. The following best describes my school board at election time:

\_\_\_ It is difficult to find candidates.

\_\_\_ Candidates are supported by two or more general interest groups.

\_\_\_ Candidates are supported by educational interest groups.

\_\_\_ Candidates surface from the general community.

17. My school board’s relationship with the community can best be described as:

\_\_\_ Adversarial with the community interests.

\_\_\_ Supportive of the community interests.

\_\_\_ Indifferent to the community interests.

\_\_\_ Compliant with the community interests.

18. The school board uses research-based information and data about schools to:

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\_\_\_ Fuel the differences between competing factions.

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\_\_\_ A new faction became the majority on the board.

\_\_\_ I ran afoul of some unforeseen community norms, beliefs, or values.

27. When I have job-related stress as a superintendent, the stress was probably caused

by:

\_\_\_ Differences between board and community leaders.

\_\_\_ Conflict between two or more board factions.

\_\_\_ School board rejection of my recommendations.

\_\_\_ Little board and community interest in education.

**THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION WAS NOT INCLUDED IN THE SURVEY  
SENT FOR THIS STUDY, BUT WAS INCLUDED IN THE ORIGINAL SURVEY  
AS SENT BY DR. GARY L. JOHNSON**

Demographic and Other Information:

28. Have you considered leaving your current job as a superintendent of school as a result of economic, social, and political changes that have taken place in the last three years? (Circle one, then elaborate in the space provided).

Yes

No

29. What is your age?

30. What is your gender?

31. What is your highest degree earned?

a. Bachelor's

b. Master's

c. Specialist

d. Doctorate

32. The median income in my community is (circle one).

Above \$35,000

Below \$35,000

33. The majority of households in my community tend to have at least one member with a (circle one).

- a. College degree
- b. Post high school/two-year technical college degree
- c. High school degree or less

34. Which of the following describes my district? (circle one).

- a. Large Urban
- b. Suburban
- c. Small Urban
- d. Rural

35. The average enrollment in my school district is (circle one).

- a. 0-499
- b. 500-999
- c. 1,000-2,999
- d. 3,000-5,999
- e. 6,000-8,999
- f. 9,000+

36. What is the average number of years of tenure for school board members in your district?

37. How many years have you served as superintendent of school in your current school district?

38. How many years have you served as superintendent of school including your current district?

39. How many innovative programs have been initiated in your school district in the past five years?

40. What is your school district's overall District API Score for Regular Education Students for the past three years?

41. Do you believe that your district is experiencing improved student achievement? Explain.

42. Do you believe that you have a proficient knowledge about your district's improvement goals, curriculum, instruction assessment, and staff development? Explain.

Please add additional comments, information, or insights about superintendent-board, board-community, or community-superintendent relationships that the questionnaire did not allow you to express.

## APPENDIX C

### Letter of Permission to Use Survey Tool

Dear Lea,

I wish you much success in the completion of your doctoral program. Your request to utilize my survey instrument as part of your proposal is both acceptable to me and complimentary to my previous work. You also have my permission to publish the survey instrument. If you have any additional questions or wish to discuss your work further, please call. I look forward to reading your findings.

Sincerely,



Gary L. Johnson, Ed.D  
(405) 488-9517

## APPENDIX D

### Survey Tool Key

D=Dominated Power Structure

F=Factional Power Structure

SC=Status Congruent Power Structure

S=Sanctioning Power Structure

### Community Behaviors:

1. When critical issues develop in my school community, they are:  
 Discussed and decided openly. **(SC)**  
 Subjected to controversy by competing community groups. **(F)**  
 Resolved by one person or group of people. **(D)**  
 Not discussed. **(S)**
2. My community can best be described as socioeconomically  
 homogeneous  
 heterogeneous  
 changing
3. Power and influence in my community tends to be:  
 Divided relatively equally. **(SC)**  
 Divided between two or more factions. **(F)**  
 Concentrated unequally in one or two individuals or small groups. **(D)**  
 Difficult or impossible to identify. **(S)**
4. Which of the following best describes public concern for issues in my community?  
 The same individuals and group(s) tend to get involved in all issues. **(D)**

- There tends not to be much interest or involvement regarding all issues. **(F)**
- Groups of individuals involved with educational issues generally are not involved in other community issues. **(S)**
- Groups mobilize or disappear based on specific issues. **(SC)**
5. Leadership in my community tends to be:
- Centered on one or two individuals. **(D)**
- Divided among the leaders of different groups. **(SC)**
- Shared by a number of individuals. **(F)**
- Delegated to administrators. **(S)**
6. People who use power or influence in my community could be described as:
- Persons with financial resources. **(F)**
- Persons linked by long-standing friendships and social relationships. **(D)**
- Persons who hold elected office or appointed positions. **(SC)**
- There is little evidence of people using power or influence. **(S)**
7. The following behaviors tend to best describe my community when general elections are conducted:
- Candidates surface from a single community-wide leadership group. **(D)**
- Candidates surface from competing groups. **(F)**
- It is difficult to find candidates. **(S)**
- Candidates tend to represent specific issues across the community. **(SC)**
8. When general elections are conducted in my community, the results tend to be:
- Predictable. **(D OR S)**
- Unpredictable. **(F OR SC)**

9. Elections in my community tend to be:

\_\_\_ Uncontested with organized support for the candidate. **(D)**

\_\_\_ Contested with no apparent organized support or opposition for the candidate. **(SC)**

\_\_\_ Contested with organized support and opposition for the candidate. **(F)**

\_\_\_ Uncontested with no apparent organized support for the candidate. **(S)**

School Board Behaviors:

10. School board members in my school district tend to represent:

\_\_\_ A specific group and its interests. **(F OR SC)**

\_\_\_ Broad community interests. **(D OR S)**

11. Board membership tends to be:

\_\_\_ Unstable over time with unpredictable change of members. **(F OR SC)**

\_\_\_ Stable over time with predictable changes of members. **(D OR S)**

12. Power and influence on my school board tends to be:

\_\_\_ Divided equally among all board members. **(SC)**

\_\_\_ Divided equally between two or more factions. **(F)**

\_\_\_ Concentrated unequally in one or two board members. **(D)**

\_\_\_ Difficult or impossible to identify. **(S)**

13. Votes on significant or critical issues tend to be:

\_\_\_ 4-3 with the same people tending to vote in the minority. **(F)**

\_\_\_ 6-1 with the same people tending to vote in the minority. **(D)**

\_\_\_ 6-1 with different people tending to vote in the minority. **(S)**

\_\_\_ 6-1 or 4-3 but different members will vote in the minority each time. **(SC)**

14. When significant issues face my school board, members tend to rely on:
- Information and data. **(SC)**
  - The opinion of influential school board or community member(s). **(D)**
  - The superintendent's recommendation. **(S)**
  - The opinion of the community groups they represent. **(F)**
15. The resolution of conflict over issues by the school board can best be described as the school board:
- Going along with the "conventional wisdom" of the community decision-makers. **(D)**
  - Acting as a "corporate board of directors." **(SC)**
  - Exposing the conflict to a "marketplace of competing interests and ideas."  
**(F)**
  - Relying on the "superintendent as the decision-maker." **(S)**
16. The following best describes my school board at election time:
- It is difficult to find candidates. **(S)**
  - Candidates are supported by two or more general interest groups. **(F)**
  - Candidates are supported by educational interest groups. **(SC)**
  - Candidates surface from the general community. **(D)**
17. My school board's relationship with the community can best be described as:
- Adversarial with the community interests. **(F)**
  - Supportive of the community interests. **(SC)**
  - Indifferent to the community interests. **(S)**
  - Compliant with the community interests. **(D)**

18. The school board uses research-based information and data about schools to:

- Sort rationally through alternative proposals. **(SC)**
- Support only the prevailing policies. **(D)**
- Fuel the differences between competing factions. **(F)**
- Support only the superintendent's recommendations. **(S)**

Superintendent Behaviors:

19. When the school board is making a decision on a critical issue, I tend to:

- Provide information and recommendations. **(SC)**
- Make the decisions. **(S)**
- Analyze board factions to shape recommendations. **(F)**
- Meet with the board leader(s) for advice. **(D)**

20. When the school board is making a decision on a critical issue, I tend to:

- Use citizen committees to resolve conflict. **(F)**
- Encourage discussion among the board. **(SC)**
- Make a recommendation for action. **(S)**
- Consult with the board leader(s). **(D)**

21. When school board agendas are developed, I tend to:

- Seek advice form the school board leaders. **(D)**
- Develop the school board agenda alone. **(S)**
- Balance the interest of different board factions. **(F)**
- Use professional staff and school board suggestions. **(SC)**

22. When a decision on a significant issue has to be made without a meeting of the school board, I tend to:

\_\_\_ Make the decision and inform the board. **(S)**

\_\_\_ Consult with informal board leader(s). **(D)**

\_\_\_ Consult with all factions on the school board. **(F)**

\_\_\_ Seek expert advice before making the decision. **(SC)**

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I had:

\_\_\_ Conflict resolution and community relations skills. **(F)**

\_\_\_ Effective interpersonal and social skills. **(D)**

\_\_\_ Professional and leadership skills. **(SC)**

\_\_\_ Administrative and operational skills. **(S)**

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\_\_\_ A new faction became the majority on the board. **(F)**

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27. When I have job-related stress as a superintendent, the stress was probably caused

by:

\_\_\_ Differences between board and community leaders. **(D)**

\_\_\_ Conflict between two or more board factions. **(F)**

\_\_\_ School board rejection of my recommendations. **(SC)**

\_\_\_ Little board and community interest in education. **(S)**

**APPENDIX E**

**Code/Theme Triangulation**

Dominated					
Theme	Code	Interview	Social Media	Policy/Handbook	Member Check
Decision Making	Trust	D1, D2	D1, D2		D1, D2
	Collaboration	D1, D2	D1	D1, D2	D1, D2
	Board Action	D1, D2	D1, D2	D1, D2	D1, D2
Serving	Community	D1, D2	D1, D2		D1, D2
	School Board	D1, D2		D1, D2	D1, D2
	Students	D1, D2	D1	D1, D2	D1, D2
	Faculty/Staff	D1, D2	D1, D2	D1, D2	D1, D2
Leading	Learning	D1, D2			D1, D2
	Reflection	D1, D2			D1, D2
	Planning	D1, D2	D1, D2	D1, D2	D1, D2
Managing	Training	D1, D2		D1, D2	D1, D2
	Facilities	D1, D2	D1	D1, D2	D1, D2
	Finances	D1, D2		D1, D2	D1, D2
	Mediating	D1, D2			D1, D2

Factional					
Theme	Code	Interview	Social Media	Policy/Handbook	Member Check
School Business	Finances	F1	F1	F1	F1
	Facilities	F1	F1		F1
	Planning	F1	F1		F1
Decision Making	Trust	F1			F1
	School Board	F1	F1	F1	F1
	Students	F1	F1		F1
	Faculty/Staff	F1		F1	F1

Leading	Community	F1	F1		F1
	Communication	F1	F1		F1
	Conflict	F1			F1
	Reflect/Learn	F1			F1
	Support/Serve	F1	F1		F1

Sanctioning					
Theme	Code	Interview	Social Media	Policy/Handbook	Member Check
Decision Making	Experience	S1, S2			S1, S2
	Community	S1, S2	S1, S2		S1, S2
	School Board	S1, S2		S1, S2	S1, S2
	Kids	S1, S2	S1, S2	S1, S2	S1, S2
	Delegate	S1, S2			S1, S2
	Support/Trust	S1, S2	S1, S2		S1, S2
	Self-Action	S1, S2			S1, S2
Managing	Hire/Fire	S1, S2		S1, S2	S1, S2
	Money/Assets	S1	S1		S1
	Physical Presence	S1, S2	S2		S1, S2
	Operations	S1, S2		S1, S2	S1, S2
Vision/Mission	Planning	S1, S2	S1, S2		S1, S2
	Collaboration	S1, S1	S1, S2	S1, S2	S1, S2
	Communication	S1, S2	S1, S2		S1, S2

Status Congruent					
Theme	Code	Interview	Social Media	Policy/Handbook	Member Check
Growth	Learning	SC1, SC2	SC1		SC1, SC2
	Conflict	SC1, SC2			SC1, SC2
	Trust	SC1, SC2	SC1, SC2		SC1, SC2
	Personal	SC1, SC2			SC1, SC2
	Judgement				

Decision-Making

	Community	SC1, SC2	SC1, SC2		SC1, SC2
	Collaboration	SC1, SC2	SC1, SC2	SC1, SC2	SC1, SC2
	Students	SC1, SC2	SC1, SC2	SC1, SC2	SC1, SC2
	Faculty/Staff	SC1, SC2	SC2		SC1, SC2
	School Board	SC1, SC2		SC1, SC2	SC1, SC2
	Data	SC1, SC2	SC1, SC2	SC1, SC2	SC1, SC2
Managing					
	Finances	SC1, SC2	SC1, SC2	SC1, SC2	SC1, SC2
	Policy	SC1, SC2		SC1, SC2	SC1, SC2
	Balance	SC1, SC2			SC1, SC2
	Directing	SC1, SC2		SC1, SC2	SC1, SC2
Leading					
	Informing	SC1, SC2	SC1, SC2	SC1, SC2	SC1, SC2
	Relationships	SC1, SC2			SC1, SC2
	Communication	SC1, SC2	SC1, SC2	SC1, SC2	SC1, SC2

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