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Examining Partnerships Between Suburban Principals and Superintendents

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Abstract

School districts, and their individual schools, are guided by the leadership of superintendent-principal pairs. While superintendents and principals have a working relationship, not all these working relationships can be described as a partnership. Little is known about how partnerships between superintendents and principals are developed, maintained, and repaired and how established partnerships impact organizational effectiveness. Specific to suburban districts, the recent increased level of accountability for student achievement, under the Every Student Succeeds Act, is amplified due to the decrease in threshold numbers for accountability subgroups. The purpose of the study was to examine principal-superintendent partnerships in suburban districts using the four components of West and Derrington's (2009) framework for leadership teaming. In addition, the study examined how principal-superintendent partnerships contribute to accountability and organizational effectiveness. The study used a qualitative research design to study the experiences of six principal-superintendent pairs. Data were collected using semi-structured dyadic interviews. Three major findings emerged from the study. First, the principal-superintendent partnership flexed the hierarchical boundaries that exist in K-12 education. Second, the development of principal-superintendent partners is an effective leadership strategy towards increasing organizational effectiveness. Third, as part of a principal-superintendent partnership, principals have the opportunity to become more innovative as leaders. This study provides recommendations for research, superintendents, principals, professional organizations, and higher educational institutions.

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Dedication

The curiosity that resulted in this study was fueled by my work relationship with Dr. Mark Linton, my superintendent. While we noticed our ability to lead together, as partners, early in our tenure together, we could not definitively say how it happened. Dr. Linton, thank you for not only mentoring me as a school leader, but also as a scholar.

Throughout my dissertation journey, I have envisioned this experience as a climb up Mt. Everest. This climb would not have happened without the support, guidance, feedback, and motivation of my two Sherpas, Dr. Marie Cianca and Dr. Linda McGinley. Thank you, Dr. Cianca and Dr. McGinley, for all the encouragement and thought-provoking questions that moved a simple wonder about work relationships into a dissertation study.

As I traveled this journey, I was honored to be a member of Team iCITE. Thank you to April, Jennifer, and Sue for all the support you gave me along the way. We finished a strong team, but more importantly, we finished lifelong friends. Thank you for everything and I cannot wait to hear where life takes you from here.

As a school anchored on relationships, I cannot thank the faculty and staff at East Rochester Jr./Sr. High School enough for the support and encouragement given to me over these last 2 years. To my administrative team, thank you for working collaboratively to create the space for me to pursue this dream. I could not have made this climb without this amazing team around me. Collectively, our students and community are blessed to have such loving and dedicated educators in their lives.

The life lessons learned from my parents, Jan and Linda van Harssel, were the foundation I needed to complete this dissertation. Both my mom and dad modeled hard work, perseverance, a love for learning, and a desire to make relationships. These core beliefs, passed on by them, have made me the person I am today and the researcher I was for this dissertation. My father- and mother-in-law, John and Sharon Murray have always provided the love and support that our family needed at just the right times. Thank you, both. My sister, Lindsay, has always inspired me with her drive to reach her goals and dreams. Seeing the time, energy, and passion you bring to all aspects of your life is awe-inspiring.

I simply cannot put into words how much love and gratitude I have for my wife, MacKenzie. She is my rock. Her support, encouragement, source of strength, and ability to keep everything together allowed me to continue moving forward on this dissertation journey. I can say with complete certainty; I would not have made it without her.

This dissertation is dedicated to my children; Ava Elizabeth, Emerson Grace, and Andrew John. Their unconditional love and support were felt throughout this entire experience. My hope is that they will be lifelong learners who surpass the goals they never thought they could reach. There is nothing I will ever be prouder of than the three of them.

Biographical Sketch

Casey van Harssel began his career in education as a Biology and Chemistry teacher in Northern Virginia. Throughout his journey, Mr. van Harssel has served as an assistant principal in two high schools before becoming the principal of East Rochester Jr./Sr. High School in 2014. Throughout this time, he has worked under the leadership of four principals and four superintendents.

Mr. van Harssel completed his undergraduate studies at Niagara University and graduated with his Bachelor of Arts/Sciences Degree with a major in Biology and a minor in Chemistry in 2004. Remaining at Niagara University, he earned his Master of Science in Adolescent Education with a concentration in Biology in 2005. He then earned his Educational Administration Certificate from Shenandoah University in 2010.

Mr. van Harssel began the Executive Leadership Program at St. John Fisher College in 2017, completing the program in 2019. Mr. van Harssel pursued his research on the partnerships that exist between principals and their superintendent. His studies were completed under the direction of Dr. Marie Cianca and Dr. Linda McGinley.

Abstract

School districts, and their individual schools, are guided by the leadership of superintendent-principal pairs. While superintendents and principals have a working relationship, not all these working relationships can be described as a partnership. Little is known about how partnerships between superintendents and principals are developed, maintained, and repaired and how established partnerships impact organizational effectiveness. Specific to suburban districts, the recent increased level of accountability for student achievement, under the Every Student Succeeds Act, is amplified due to the decrease in threshold numbers for accountability subgroups. The purpose of the study was to examine principal-superintendent partnerships in suburban districts using the four components of West and Derrington's (2009) framework for leadership teaming. In addition, the study examined how principal-superintendent partnerships contribute to accountability and organizational effectiveness. The study used a qualitative research design to study the experiences of six principal-superintendent pairs. Data were collected using semi-structured dyadic interviews. Three major findings emerged from the study. First, the principal-superintendent partnership flexed the hierarchical boundaries that exist in K-12 education. Second, the development of principal-superintendent partners is an effective leadership strategy towards increasing organizational effectiveness. Third, as part of a principal-superintendent partnership, principals have the opportunity to become more innovative as leaders. This study provides recommendations for research,

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Leadership in K-12 Education

In the fall of 2018, about 50.7 million students started their school year in 13,600 public school districts across the United States of America (National Center of Education Statistics, 2018). While classroom teaching has the greatest influence on pupil learning (Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins, 2008), school leadership, consisting of principals and superintendents, has the greatest influence on a school district (Cooley & Shen, 2000; Onorato, 2013). The 89,810 public school principals in the US are responsible for the operations of their schools, such as curricular alignment, instruction, safety, and student management (Kafka, 2009; National Center of Education Statistics, 2018). As the other key leadership position, the 13,600 superintendents in the US are responsible for guiding their districts according to each district's mission and vision. The challenge is creating a balance that maintains fiscal stability while navigating the political climate in a community (Björk, Browne-Ferrigno, & Kowalski, 2014; The School Superintendents Association, 2018).

While superintendents and principals are the fundamental individuals of school leadership, they cannot effectively operate independently (West and Derrington, 2009). The superintendent is the most influential person within a school district (Onorato, 2013), often given the unofficial title of chief executive officer (Björk et al., 2014). School principals represent the most important position in education due to their roles and responsibilities in their school buildings (Cooley & Shen, 2000). The importance of these

two positions explains why effective collaboration between these two positions positively affects the school district and the overall educational system (Honig & Venkateswaran, 2012; Lawson et al., 2017; West, 2011).

There are several dynamic forces that influence the development of the collaboration between superintendents and principals. First, the establishment of both the superintendency and principalship, and the evolution of roles and responsibilities, has influenced the level of collaboration (Björk et al., 2014; Kafka, 2009; Velasco, Edmonson, & Slate, 2012). Second, the hierarchical system, which places the superintendent as supervisor to the principal, is an influential factor in collaboration between superintendent and principal (Hvidston, Range, & McKim, 2015, Myers & Murphy, 1995). Third, a force of overlapping accountability, created at the federal and state level, accompanies both positions and influences collaboration (Lynch, 2012; Singh & Al-Fadhli, 2011; Thompson & France, 2015). Fourth, the organizational structure of leadership within the district, often a factor of district size, influences collaboration (Forner, Bierlein-Palmer, & Reeves, 2012; Myers & Murray, 1995). A review of these four dynamic forces will provide the necessary information for framing this study.

Evolution of superintendent and principal roles. First formally established in Buffalo, New York in 1837, the superintendency spread to other urban areas and eventually suburban and rural areas as district consolidation became widespread in the late 1800s (Björk et al., 2014). Over the last 150 years, political, social, economic, and technological changes have defined and redefined the superintendency. Two different studies created frameworks to provide an understanding of the breadth and complexity of the role of the superintendent (Björk et al., 2014; Copeland, 2013). Taken together, these

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studies found that modern superintendents act as communicators, managers, political figures, and visionaries (Björk et al., 2014; Copeland, 2013).

In contrast to the birth of the superintendency in urban settings, the principalship can be traced back to the growth of the single-room school house (Kafka, 2009). As schools became larger and had grade-level organization in the early 1800s, the position of principal teacher was created (Kafka, 2009). These early principals had various roles, including assigning classes, conducting discipline, maintaining the building, and tracking attendance (Kafka, 2009). Over time, the principalship shifted from manager to instructional leader and supervisor (Cooley & Shen, 2000; Kafka, 2009; Lynch, 2012).

The shift in the responsibilities of the principal was a direct result of an increase in school populations (Lynch, 2012). As school populations increased, and more districts started to form through consolidation of local schools, principals began to work for school district superintendents. The working relationship between principal and superintendent evolved to complement each other out of necessity (Kafka, 2009). Superintendents granted independence and autonomy to principals to lead each school, allowing the superintendent the ability to lead a district (Kafka, 2009). The interplay between these two leadership roles within a district continues to evolve in modern school districts (Lawson et al., 2017). It is worth noting that most empirical research on school and district leadership focuses on urban or rural districts in isolation or as a comparative study using urban, suburban, and rural districts. As an exception, Thompson and France (2015) performed a comparative study using only suburban school district as an extension of previous research that identified the five leadership practices in urban schools (Honig et al., 2010).

Hierarchy versus teaming. School districts, much like the corporate system, are organized in a hierarchical model (Derrington & Larsen, 2012). The superintendent is the top person on the organizational chart, while principals are middle managers who lead individual schools (Derrington & Larsen, 2012). Annually, the evaluation of principals by the superintendent, or a designee, is mandated (Hvidston et al., 2015). In terms of a principal's decision-making power, it is the superintendent who determines the level of autonomy a principal has for personnel, budgetary, and instructional decisions (Weiner & Woulfin, 2016). Important to note, the superintendent works at the discretion of the local school board. It is the school board that adopts the budget, sets goals for student achievement and evaluates progress towards those goals, decides school boundaries, approves school building construction and closures, and sets policies that determine instructional programs and resources (New York State School Board Association, 2018) Notwithstanding the reality of a hierarchical system in public education, there is more to the roles of superintendent and principal than just boss and middle manager (West & Derrington, 2009).

The team of superintendent and principal has been researched from different perspectives with a common theme emerging: trust (Chang, Leach, & Anderson, 2013; Forner et al., 2012; Myers & Joseph, 1995; West & Derrington, 2009). Trust between superintendent and principal is built from effective communication, frequent collaboration, and a perspective of competency (West and Derrington, 2009). Conversely, distrust between superintendent and principal forms from a lack of communication, limited collaboration, and a narrow perspective of competency to do the job (Daly,

Moolenaar, Liou, Tuytens, & Del Fresno, 2015; Derrington & Larsen, 2012; West & Derrington, 2009).

While trust fosters collaboration, it also gives the superintendent confidence to grant autonomy to principals to make decisions in their schools (Chang et al., 2013; Forner et al., 2012; Myers & Joseph, 1995; Waters and Marzano, 2006). Interestingly, principals gain trust in their superintendent when granted autonomy (Forner et al., 2012; Honig, 2012; Walker, Kutsyuruba, & Noonan, 2011). Stated another way, trust builds in a cyclical manner insofar as superintendents trust their principals more, they tend to grant principals more autonomy, which results in a greater level of trust from the principal to the superintendent.

Whether examining the superintendent and principal as a hierarchical model or two members of the team, these two positions are held to the highest level of accountability when it comes to the effectiveness of the school district (Lawson et al., 2017; Singh & Al-Fadhli, 2011; West & Derrington, 2009). The next section will review how schools and school districts have been held accountable at the federal and state levels. In addition, evidence will be shared on how the increased level of accountability affects the roles of the principals and the superintendent within a school district.

Accountability. School district accountability reform has been evolving for the last 65 years, following the Supreme Court's 1954 landmark Brown v. Board of Education decision ("The Big Idea," 2018). With increased accountability in school districts, mostly aligned to test scores, educational leaders are becoming less isolated and more exposed to scrutiny (Lynch, 2012). Student proficiency rates on assessments have become a major indicator of leadership effectiveness.

One of the most profound federal laws to impact United States public schools in the 21st century was the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). The NCLB legislation was a reauthorization of the historic Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 (Dee & Jacob, 2010). ESEA incorporated financial support for schools and school districts serving high concentrations of economically disadvantaged students. The federal government dramatically expanded the scope and scale under NCLB to include all public schools and all students (Dee & Jacob, 2010).

Under NCLB, annual testing was required of all public-school students in reading and mathematics in grades 3 through 8 and at least once in grades 10 through 12 (Dee & Jacob, 2010). Additionally, NCLB required all states to have statewide systems of accountability to determine if schools were making adequate yearly progress (AYP). Schools were assessed on their AYP for all students and 10 accountability subgroups with greater than 30 students taking the assessments. Accountability subgroups include students with disabilities, English language learners (ELL), economically disadvantaged students, and students separated into major ethnic and racial groups (New York State Education Department, 2018). If a school did not make AYP in all their accountability subgroups, it could be labeled as a school needing improvement, be required to fire staff, and/or lose federal funding (Dee & Jacob, 2010).

Common among suburban school districts is the fact that the 30-student threshold is not reached in each of the 10 accountability subgroups (New York State Education Department, 2018). While urban schools were often held accountable to the success, or lack of success, of each subgroup due to meeting the threshold of each subgroup,

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suburban districts were often not being held accountable, under NCLB, to the academic success of all their students.

The revised version of NCLB, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), was signed into law in December of 2015. While ESSA still requires academic standards, there is significantly more control at the state and district level to determine the standards (United States Department of Education, 2018). Additionally, ESSA requires that schools teach the content and skills at high standards to prepare students to succeed in college and careers (United States Department of Education, 2018). Also, while states still need to set academic targets for schools, the requirement to achieve AYP was eliminated. Instead of a school potentially losing funding and staff, a failing school is given more funding after developing a plan for improvement ("The difference between," 2018).

While suburban schools were held less accountable under NCLB, due to the 30-student threshold within each subgroup, ESSA holds all districts to a higher standard by lowering the threshold to 30 *exams* over a 2-year timeframe (NYSED, 2018). That means if a student in a subgroup takes three tests in a given year, they are counted three times, instead of once. These new data sets, incorporating multiple years to increase the subgroup size, are making suburban schools districts more accountable for a larger portion of their student population's success on state assessments.

Taken together, NCLB and ESSA reshaped the accountability for educational leadership at the district and school levels due to student performance on assessments (Lynch, 2012). For example, the role of school principals has had to shift from building manager to instructional leader by overseeing curricular alignment, instructional shifts, and intervention programs (Printy & Williams, 2015). Successful superintendents have

had to shift from visionary to facilitator by transforming strong external demands into internal action (Johnstone, Dikkers, & Luedeke, 2009).

New York State school districts. The alignment of school districts in each of the 50 states of the United States of America, such as New York State, can be traced back to the Amendment X of the United States Constitution (United States Department of Education, 2018). Under Amendment X, "powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people" (U. S. Constitution). Amendment X relegated the responsibility for structuring educational systems to the states, and, because of this, school district sizes and configurations vary significantly. Of the 50 states, only Hawaii has a single state-wide district that oversees the entire state. On the other end of the spectrum, Texas has 1,029 districts (National Center of Education Statistics, 2018).

NYS school district configurations. For the purposes of this study, detailed information about New York State (NYS) was researched due to New York's unique school district configuration. According to the National Center of Education Statistics (2018), NYS was the fourth highest state in the number of districts and 36th highest state in average district population. Considering these two rankings, the educational system in NYS has established a relatively high number of small districts led by a superintendent. New York State's 733 districts are not aligned by counties and vary in size from having zero students and no classrooms in the Raquette Lake Union Free School District to 940,000 students in the New York City School District (New York State Education Department, 2017). Of the 733 districts, the five largest districts represent the urban centers of the state and are classified as the *Big 5*. Due to the unique circumstances of

these districts, the New York State Education Department has created specific guidelines for these five districts (NYSED, 2017). After removing the Big 5, the remaining 728 school districts can be further separated by student population. The breakdown of the remaining 728 NYS school districts is shown in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1

Distribution of New York State School Districts by Student Population (Excluding the Big Five)

Student Population	Number of Districts	% of NYS schools
Less than 4500	597	82
Less than 3,659*	561	77
Less than 3,000	510	70
Less than 1,500	364	50

Note. Adapted from New York State Education Department. (2017). Public School Enrollment. Retrieved from http://www.p12.nysed.gov/irs/statistics/enroll-n-staff/home.html; Governing the states and localities (2018). Total school districts, student enrollment by state and metro area. Retrieved 3/12/18 from http://www.governing.com/gov-data/education-data/school-district-totals-average-enrollment-statistics-for-states-metro-areas.html.
*National average for school district size.

As the data show, many NYS schools are considered *small* in comparison to districts nationally. In two separate studies, (Forner et al., 2012; Myers & Murphy, 1995) district size was a factor in the ability of superintendents and principals to form a professional working relationship, due to frequency of interactions both formally and informally, and collegial observations. There is potential value in the use of student population size as a consideration when researching collaboration between district and school leadership due to increasing leadership layers as student enrollment increases (Lunenburg, 2011).

NYS district need/resource capacity categories. In addition to classifying NYS school districts based on student population, the state uses a *need/resource capacity (N/RC) index* (NYSED, 2018). This index measures a district's ability to meet the needs of its students with local resources using a ratio of each district's estimated poverty percentage and the Combined Wealth Ratio. Districts are divided into six main categories: (a) High N/RC: New York City; (b) High N/RC: Large City; (c) High N/RC: Urban-Suburban; (d) High N/RC: Rural; (e) Average N/RC; and (f) Low N/RC. Unlike the High N/RC, the *average* N/RC and *low* N/RC are not separated into urban-suburban and rural subcategories. Because the most updated classification list of New York State school districts, released by the NYS Education Department, uses school district population data from 2009-2010, the list may not be fully accurate regarding 2018 district populations (NYSED, 2018).

Problem Statement

Relationships among middle managers and the CEO in the private sector affect the overall job performance of these leadership positions owing to the levels of trust and collaboration (Kolk, Vock, & van Dolen, 2016). Similar to the leadership structure of middle managers and the CEO, the public-school system has a structure of school principals and a superintendent. District and school leaders have the highest level of accountability and responsibility within a school district (Myers & Murphy, 1995). Relationships, particularly those built on trust, have been shown to be essential to high performance in organizations in many settings (Eisler & Potter, 2014; Kouzes & Posner, 2006; Lawson et al., 2017; West, 2011).

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Within suburban school districts, there has been the potential for a lack of accountability and transparency due to small accountability subgroups not meeting the threshold of accountability under NCLB. The combination of lowering the subgroup threshold, under ESSA, and an increase in subgroup populations within suburban districts has increased the accountability of suburban leaders (NYSED, 2018). The ability of suburban schools to potentially mask subgroups more easily than urban or rural districts, based on subgroup counts, has decreased, requiring superintendents and principals to be even more vigilant in their commitment to all children. This increase in accountability, at both school and district levels, magnifies one of the findings of Lawson et al. (2017), which states the importance of establishing partnerships across leadership boundaries.

Based on the gap in the empirical research, there is a lack of awareness of how an established partnership between a principal and superintendent can increase organizational effectiveness at both the school and district levels. It is critical to examine the reality of how the effectiveness of a working relationship between leveled leaders can impact an organization. First, an underutilization of the knowledge and skills of middle managers in the decision-making process decreases their sense of value within the organization (Chang et al., 2015; Eisler & Potter, 2014; Rana, 2015). Second, a lack of alignment between leveled leaders on key initiatives can cause ineffective implementation, slow development of the organization, and mismanagement of resources (Printy & Williams, 2015). Often, a lack of alignment is caused by ineffective communication and collaboration on key district initiatives (Printy & Williams, 2015).

Researchers have studied the working relationship of principals and superintendents as primarily a hierarchical relationship with complementary roles that

need to work in alignment with each other (Addi-Raccah, 2015; Copeland, 2013; Daly et al., 2015; Myers & Murphy, 1995). It is critical to also look at working relationships through a non-hierarchical lens. In their book, West and Derrington (2009) discuss the importance of principals and superintendents being on collaborative teams as part of a professional learning community (PLC). Within effective PLC groups, there are no hierarchical structures. "The leadership PLC team works collaboratively toward the common goal: the achievement of all students in the community" (West & Derrington, 2009, p. 79). Umekubo, Chrispeels, and Daly (2015), conclude that collaboration, dialogue, and discussion are the pillars to effective team learning among district and school leaders to navigate how to learn together in cross-boundary teams.

There is a gap in the empirical research investigating how a principal-superintendent partnership is formed, maintained, and repaired to support organizational effectiveness. Furthermore, the studies that examine the working relationship of principals and superintendents largely focus on urban and rural settings. As stated previously, with the new accountability standards under ESSA, suburban schools are now being held to a higher level of accountability for all students due to a decrease in the minimum threshold of students within each subgroup (NYSED, 2018). Interestingly, Kolk et al. (2016), studied the concept of partnerships across organizational levels in the private sector using a *trickle-up* and *trickle-down* notion in three different companies from diverse business fields. In the private sector, establishing a partnership between middle managers and upper managers supports a desire for the middle managers to pursue learning opportunities to increase their knowledge base, increases the frequency of opportunities for the sharing of ideas on new projects, increases trust between both

individuals, and gives the middle manager the opportunity to play a more active role in new initiatives. Taken together, these outcomes result in companies with a high level of effectiveness, employees who feel valued, and profitability in their given fields. It is time to examine the working relationship of the suburban principal and superintendent as a partnership to benefit all students.

Theoretical Rationale

The broad concept of leadership has been evolving over the last 100 years, and the field of educational leadership has evolved alongside it (Bird & Wang, 2013; Northouse, 2016; Pepper, 2010; Urick, 2016; West, Peck, Reitzug, & Crane, 2014). While research indicates that there is more than one effective leadership style, a common theory applied to the working relationship between principal and superintendent is "transformational leadership" (Browning, 2014; Leithwood, 1994; McCarley, Peters, & Decman, 2016; Onorato, 2013; Stewart, 2006; Yang, 2014). "As the name implies, transformational leadership is a process that changes and transforms people" (Northouse, 2016, p. 161). In transformational leadership theory, introduced by Burns (1978), the leader engages with his or her followers to create relationships to increase motivation levels (Northouse, 2016). It is this increase in motivation that builds strong teams that are ready to create high expectations for themselves and the organization (McCarley et al., 2016).

As a framework, West and Derrington's (2009) *Leadership Teaming* is well suited for a study on the partnership between superintendent-principal pairs. Although the tenets of transformational leadership are not explicitly referenced throughout the book, West and Derrington examined the complex working relationship between principals and

superintendents and realized that the fundamental tenets of transformational leadership are present in successful principal-superintendent alliances. As a conclusion of the analysis of the data, West and Derrington (2009) developed four components of the superintendent-principal relationship; (a) Leadership Teaming, (b) Leadership Qualities, (c) Leadership Team Essentials, and (d) Leadership Learning. West and Derrington's (2009) four components were developed using both research and professional experience. Many principals and superintendents were interviewed to share stories on the successes and failures of the principal-superintendent relationship. These stories were interpreted through the lens of 55 years of combined educational leadership experience; West as elementary principal for 30 years and Derrington as superintendent for 18 years and principal for seven. While the four components examine the relationship in a hierarchical model, each component provides aspects to forming an effective superintendent-principal relationship. Using this framework as a lens, this study will examine if and how the formation of such a partnership aligns with these four components.

Leadership teaming. The success of a school district cannot be the individual agenda of the superintendent. The most successful districts have strong teams (principals and superintendent) made up of strong relationships (West & Derrington, 2009). Furthermore, an optimistic outlook supports the efforts of the team. From the viewpoint of the superintendent, the team needs to be interdependent with a mindset of *ours,* not *my.* From the perspective of principal, principals flourish when their superintendent provides a vision and sets the tone for team interactions by creating favorable conditions (West & Derrington, 2009).

Leadership qualities. There are qualities that support the development of successful leadership teams. Principals and superintendents need to have a strong foundation of instructional leadership (West & Derrington, 2009). Schools are known as people places, so leaders need to bring well-developed interpersonal skills to the team. Additionally, the development of the team is supported best with competent, caring and committed members. From the perspective of the superintendent, leading must come from the heart and must be grounded in strong character, commitment, interpersonal skills, and a genuine care for the students and staff. From the perspective of the principal, successful superintendents create authentic teams by knowing the details of their organization. Specifically, successful superintendents are aware of the needs of their principals, the school programs available to students, the support needed by staff, and the capacity for collaboration in a trust-building manner.

Leadership team essentials. While numerous team essentials are required between principal and superintendent, the key team essential from the superintendent viewpoint is trust at a fundamental level. "Trust underlies healthy principal-superintendent relationships" (West & Derrington, 2009, p. 106). Trust is gained over time through open and frequent communication and supportive actions (West & Derrington, 2009). In addition to trust, from the principal viewpoint, other essentials critical to the creation of the principal-superintendent team include crystal clear expectations, open communication, and a commitment to professional, collaborative, and ethical behavior.

Leadership learning. There is a mindset of continuous learning between principals and superintendents that is generated from various sources of professional

development, experience and conversation (West & Derrington, 2009). Superintendents nurture their principals while pushing them to take control of their own. From the lens of the superintendent, a superintendent's participation in authentic professional development with a focus on improving the principal-superintendent team provides a model to the entire staff. From the standpoint of principals, effective superintendents make principal professional development a priority.

West and Derrington's four components, as described, will serve as the framework to organize the complex relationship between principal and superintendent in this study.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the study was to examine the principal-superintendent relationship in suburban districts using the four components of West and Derrington's (2009) framework. In addition, the study examined the working relationship of the principal and superintendent to gain a deeper understanding of how partnerships form between school leaders. Lastly, this study examined how these partnerships contribute to accountability and organizational effectiveness.

The roles of the principal and superintendent have grown increasingly complex in the current era of accountability and social change (Capelluti & Nye, 2005; Shoho & Barnett, 2010; West & Derrington, 2009). For that reason, studies have investigated how to more effectively support and educate students as part of a school building-district office approach (Honig, 2012; Honig & Venkateswaran, 2012; West, 2011). Specifically, student learning benefits from the creation of a team approach between individual schools and the district office on instruction, curricular alignment and data (Honig, 2012; Honig

& Venkateswaran, 2012; West, 2011). The West and Derrington framework (2009) guided the following research questions for this study:

1. How do principals and superintendents in suburban districts develop, maintain and repair aspects of a partnership, or non-hierarchical working relationship?

2. How does a partnership between principals and superintendents in suburban districts contribute to organizational effectiveness and accountability?

The themes that resulted from an analysis of the data, that represent the answers to these questions, provided valuable insight into the complex relationship of principals and superintendents.

Significance of the Study

The principal is the most important position in the district (Cooley & Shen, 2000). The superintendent is the most influential person within a school district (Onorato, 2013). Not surprisingly, the key components of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) emphasize how principals and superintendents are held accountable for organizational effectiveness. In addition to NCLB's focus on student academic achievement, ESSA includes: (a) student growth on assessments; (b) cohort data on long-term goals and measure of interim progress (MIPs); (c) graduation rate; (d) chronic absenteeism; (e) college, career, and civic readiness; and (f) English language proficiency.

It is critical that principals and superintendents use effective communication and collaboration to be in full alignment with key district initiatives. Having alignment between principals and superintendents ensures organizational effectiveness due to a consistent focus on goals, expectations and outcomes using the resources available (Printy & Williams, 2015). As a complementary pair, both the principal and

superintendent must work in tandem to lead the school and district forward with improved organizational effectiveness.

In terms of this relationship, Fullan (2002) concluded that as a principal's relationship improves with his or her superintendent, so does the overall culture and student achievement in the school he or she leads. Given a well-established working relationship with their superintendent, principals feel valued for their knowledge and contribution to the district. West and Derrington (2009) wrote that "no matter how knowledgeable, dynamic, or influential a superintendent or principal may be individually, neither can operate independently" (p. 105).

The findings of this study may contribute to the effectiveness of current leaders in education, as well as leadership development programs. In addition, the findings of this study may help principal and superintendent hiring committees as they bring new educational leadership into their district. Lastly, on a broader scale, the fact that this study will focus on suburban school districts may allow for a comparison to the findings in previous research studies that target urban and rural school districts.

Definitions of Terms

This section contains definitions of key terms used throughout the dissertation. Each term is defined based on how it is used in the field of education or how it is used in the research literature.

Working Relationship - Individuals in a hierarchical structure working together as a team to improve both their individual effectiveness and the organization (West & Derrington, 2009).

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Partnership - Interactions between individuals within organizations working beyond the traditional organizational levels (Kolk et al., 2016). As an extension, these partnerships have been described as *cross-boundary* partnerships because they cross established boundaries in terms of job responsibility, title, influence, and decision-making power (Lawson et al., 2017).

Suburban - A school district with at least 100 students per square mile or an enrollment greater than 2,500 and more than 50 students per square mile (NYSED, 2018).

Chapter Summary

This chapter provides an overview of K-12 educational leadership as a collaborative process between superintendent and building principal. The hierarchical model of educational leadership has been evolving for well over 150 years, with recent increases on accountability for student achievement at both the school and district level. Unlike many other states, 77% of NYS districts have enrollment numbers below the national average of 3,659 students (NYSED, 2017). A smaller district size allows for greater opportunities for collaboration between the superintendent and principals (Forner et al., 2012, Myers & Murphy, 1995). In addition, West and Derrington (2009) developed a framework to study the collaboration between superintendent and principal as a working relationship for the purpose of improving organizational effectiveness. Interestingly, West and Derrington (2009), along with other studies on the working relationship between superintendent and principal, examined the working relationship as a hierarchical system. To date, no K-12 education studies use the concept of a non-hierarchical partnership in their research (Lawson et al., 2017; Singh & Al-Fadhli, 2011).

The research questions in the study examined the development of the critical partnership between principal and superintendent. The application of West and Derrington's (2009) leadership teaming framework allowed for a theoretical understanding of how such a partnership may develop, be maintained, and repaired. For current principal-superintendent pairs, an awareness of the factors that influence their potential partnership will prove valuable to the effectiveness of school districts and leadership outcomes.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature regarding partnership and teaming both inside and outside the field of education. The literature review will provide the foundation needed to establish the research methods for this dissertation, described in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 presents the themes that emerged from an analysis of the qualitative data gathered from the dyadic principal-superintendent interviews. Chapter 5 provides the findings of the study, an interpretation of those findings, and recommendations based on those findings.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction and Purpose

While there are many teams within a K-12 school district, the team made up of the superintendent and his or her principals can be the most powerful (West & Derrington, 2009). To gain an understanding of school district and school building leadership, and the interactions between leaders, it is critical to analyze the K-12 educational research field in this topic area.

The review of the literature begins with an overview of organizational partnerships. To examine the concept of organizational partnerships, research will be presented from the fields of business, health care, and education. In addition, the influence of transformational leadership and shared decision-making will be analyzed around its influence on partnerships across managerial levels.

The chapter then examines the complex working relationship between principal and superintendent. The literature reveals that school districts, much like the corporate system, are organized in a hierarchy model (Derrington & Larsen, 2012). The superintendent is the top person on the organizational chart, while the principals are middle managers who are responsible for individual schools (Derrington & Larsen, 2012).

The chapter also examines how the increased level of accountability in school leadership has affected both the superintendency and principalship. Analyzed chronologically, three studies focused on how federal laws have shaped educational

leadership since NCLB in 2001 (Crum, Sherman, & Myran, 2009; Marsh, Bush-Mecenas, & Hough, 2017; Printy & Williams, 2015).

After examining accountability, the chapter reviews the training and evaluation of educational leadership as it pertains to several different leadership standards in the field of education. For the evaluation of principals and superintendents, both the 2008 Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards and the Professional Standards of Educational Leaders are used by school districts (Hvidston, McKim, & Mette, 2016; Murphy, Louis, & Smylie, 2017; Williams, 2015; Young & Perrone, 2016). In leadership preparation programs, for both building level and district level, the Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC) standards are referenced frequently (Lehman, Boyland, & Sriver, 2014; Young, Mawhinney, & Reed, 2016; Young & Perrone, 2016).

Finally, the chapter concludes with two dissertations that effectively used West and Derrington's (2009) four components of an effective principal-superintendent working relationship as either a foundation in a justification for its study (Kellogg, 2017), or the framework for its data analysis (Howard, 2014). In turn, the West and Derrington framework (2009) guided the following research questions for this study:

1. How do principals and superintendents in suburban districts develop, maintain and repair aspects of a partnership, or a non-hierarchical working relationship?

2. How does an established partnership between principals and superintendents in suburban districts contribute to organizational effectiveness and accountability?

An examination of the research literature, led by these two research questions, created the various subsections that follow in this chapter.

Organizational Partnerships

A common thread across occupational fields is a focus on how to most effectively utilize the skills and assets of individuals within the organization. While limited, research on the establishment of cross-boundary partnerships within organizations improves overall effectiveness (Eisler & Potter, 2014; Kolk et al., 2016; West, 2011). In terms of differing leadership styles that most effectively influence employees, transformational leadership empowers both the leader and followers to reach past their perceived full potential by creating purposeful relationships between the leader and followers (Bass & Avolio 1994; Northouse, 2016). The concept of shared decision-making connects the cross-boundary partnership with the practices of transformational leaders (Brazer, Rich, & Ross, 2010; Johnson, 2017; Rana, 2015).

Partnership models. The concept of creating partnerships across hierarchical levels transcends various occupational fields. Kolk et al. (2016) published their empirical study on the formation of partnerships between individuals in different levels of an organization in a *trickle-up* and *trickle-down* concept. Specifically, the research team set out to gather perceptions from employees at different levels about how partnerships are formed across strata. For this three-company case study, the research team used reputational case selection to interview 32 employees who had created partnerships across levels within their business organizations.

While Kolk et al. (2016) presented detailed findings on five levels within the three organizations, this literature review will focus on the findings for higher-level

management and direct superiors. A recurring theme regarding the formation of a partnership with higher-level management was linked to the visibility of the higher-level manager, an established *ambassador* mindset from the employee, and trust in the professionalism from both parties. When examining the findings for creating partnerships with direct supervisors, these themes included: (a) support for pursuing learning opportunities, (b) being asked to provide input on situations, (c) being trusted to complete tasks directed to them, and (d) being given the opportunity to play an active role in new initiatives (Kolk et al., 2016). In summary, Kolk et al. (2016) had empirical results showing the organizational effectiveness of partnerships across levels.

Aligned with the findings of Kolk et al. (2016), Eisler and Potter (2014) wrote an award-winning book that introduced the concept of interprofessional partnerships between nurses and physicians in the health care field. Their findings provided clear evidence that by breaking down the barriers of hierarchies within the medical field, the health care environment becomes more effective and caring (Aust, 2014). Eisler and Potter's (2014) main concept, interprofessional practice, emphasizes the importance of viewing physicians and nurses as equals because they bring their unique skill sets together to benefit the patient and families.

Shifting from the business and health care fields, West (2011) wrote about the power of a partnership between principals and superintendents. In her article, West (2011) discusses the barriers to successful teaming, as well as strategies to developing a powerful partnership between principal and superintendent. In summary, the barriers to a successful partnership revolve around negative attitudes, a lack of trust, poor communication skills, substandard performance, and unprofessional behavior.

Conversely, strategies that develop a strong partnership include adhering to professional standards, creating workplace norms, setting team goals, and engaging in collective professional development (West, 2011). While the findings in her article were grounded in an analysis of the literature, West (2011) framed the content of her article from her lens as a 43-year veteran in education with 36 years as an elementary principal. During those 36 years, she worked with and learned from 13 superintendents (C. E. West, personal communication, April 3, 2018). Examined collectively, the barriers to a successful partnership and strategies for the creation of partnership are anchored in the level of trust and communication within the working relationship.

Transformational leadership. The purposeful development of relationships as a leadership strategy is a foundation of transformational leadership (Northouse, 2016). In two separate studies from the business sector, the role of transformational leadership was correlated to employee innovativeness (Raj & Srivastava, 2016) and two attitudinal outcomes: employee job satisfaction and organizational commitment (ElKordy, 2013). As a contributing variable, ElKordy (2013) also incorporated organizational culture in his study.

Innovation exists as invisible assets embodied in the employees of a company (Raj & Srivastava, 2016). For their quantitative study, Raj and Srivastava (2016) gave the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) developed by Bass and Avolio (2004) to 321 executives across both the public and private sector. The researchers established that a transformational leadership style facilitates innovativeness at both the individual level and organizational level (Raj & Srivastava, 2016). In addition, to a greater level than other leadership styles, transformational leadership is more focused on collective goals

and decisions (Raj & Srivastava, 2016). Overall, their findings indicated that the adoption of a transformational leadership style provides an environment to facilitate learning and innovation.

As an area of transformational leadership that has been given less attention, ElKordy (2013) examined the impact of transformational leadership practices and organizational culture on job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Surveying 192 participants, data came from seven industry sectors and four organizational levels within organizations (ElKordy, 2013). The researchers indicated in the study that there was a strong influence of transformational leadership practices and organizational culture on both organizational commitment and employee satisfaction. For this reason, when recruiting managers, ElKordy (2013) emphasized the importance of including leadership questions that reflect job candidates' transformational experience.

Aligned with the finding that transformational leadership creates higher job satisfaction (ElKordy, 2013), transformational leaders in the health care field have a positive effect on the perception of organizational justice (Deschamps, Rinfret, Lagace, & Tejeda, 2016). Stated another way, the followers of transformational leaders are more motivated to work for their leader because of the climate of organizational justice that has been created (Deschamps et al., 2016). To define organizational justice, Deschamps et al. (2016) used the 3-factor model of organizational justice (distributive, procedural, interactional). Distributive justice incorporates fairness associated with decision outcomes and the distribution of resources, potentially in pay or praise. Procedural justice is associated with the processes that lead to outcomes within an organization. Interactional justice refers to the handling of how information is shared with those

impacted by decisions that have been made. Deschamps et al. (2016) surveyed 257

managers from more than 60 healthcare institutions using three different survey tools to

assess transformational leadership, perception of organizational justice, and work

motivation. Due to the fact that the health care field is in a constant state of change, the

researchers emphasized the positive implications of having employees with a trusting

organizational justice mindset.

In a separate study incorporating both the health care and educational fields,

transformational leadership was related to optimal job performance (Fernet, Trepanier,

Austin, Gagne, & Forest, 2015). In particular, nurses and school principals were selected

for this study due to a high risk of burnout for nurses and the reality that 29% of school

principals regularly question their career choice (Fernet et al., 2015). Using the results of

their study, the researchers indicated that employees of transformational leaders were

psychologically healthier, had better attitudes about their job, and performed at a higher

level. Also, the researchers concluded that transformational leadership contributed to

positive perceptions of job characteristics by providing more resources and fewer

demands (Fernet et al., 2015). Lastly, providing employees more autonomous motivation

and less controlled motivation created an overall high-quality work motivation. In

general, the research team provided empirical evidence that leaders, through their

behavior and attitude, have considerable power to shape employees' perceptions of their

work environment (Fernet et al., 2015). While this study focused on transformational

leadership in both the health care and education fields from a broad lens, the next section

will focus solely on transformational leadership in K-12 education.

In an era of increased accountability, the field of education has also benefitted from transformational leaders (Onorato, 2013). Three empirical studies (McCarley et al., 2016; Onorato, 2013; Quin, Deris, Bischoff, & Johnson, 2015) presented findings on transformational leadership in the K-12 principalship. Two common elements emerged from an analysis of these studies. First, transformational leadership was predominantly found in schools where positive change was occurring. The fundamental pillars of transformational leadership are to create a level of motivation that exceeds follower-believer levels (Northouse, 2016). The transformational leaders in the schools studied were able to create positive change through their established relationships. Second, transformational leadership in the participating schools involved interactions between school leadership, staff, and students that resulted in the potential for systemic shifts within the culture.

Using quantitative research methods, Onorato (2013) examined the managerial leadership roles of school leaders within New York State. While the findings showed a wide range in leadership styles, transformational leadership style represented 69% of the principals in the study. While this empirical study lacked methodological rigor, the results are pertinent to a broader literature review of the working relationship between principal and superintendent. Transformational leadership is anchored on relationships between individuals to motivate all to do more than they originally thought possible (Onorato, 2013). The high percentage of school leaders with transformational leadership styles is advantageous to the field of education in an era of increased accountability, collaboration, and change.

In a much more extensive quantitative study, McCarley et al. (2016) correlated perceived transformational leadership qualities displayed by the principal to perceived school climate at the high school level. McCarley et al. (2016) concluded that "there was a statistically significant relationship between all five transformational leadership factors and three of the five factors of school climate (supportive principal behavior, engaged teacher behavior, and frustrated teacher behavior)" (McCarley et al., 2016, p. 334). The purpose of this study was to test whether transformational leadership impacts all, or some aspects of school climate, based on the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire for Secondary Schools (OCDQ-RS). These results aligned with the underlying understanding of transformational leadership and school climate. As transformational leaders, these principals value relationships and support their subordinates. Under the direction of a transformational leader, followers are motivated to extend past where they ever thought they could be. Lastly, transformational leaders project optimism toward their followers, not frustration. These findings, which were from the teachers' perspective of their principal and school climate, may parallel the working relationship between principals and their superintendents and district climates.

As a comparative study on the leadership practices of principals in high and low performing schools, Quin et al. (2015) set out to develop a greater understanding of the transformational practices that may help principals increase student achievement. The results from this study revealed that principals from higher-performing schools applied all five transformational leadership practices of Kouzes and Posner more effectively and regularly as compared to principals in lower-performing schools (Quin et al., 2015). Of the five practices, the greatest differences were seen in the practices of *inspiring a shared*

vison and *challenging the process.* As indicated by the findings of this study, school districts need to include principal leadership practices as part of conversations around improving student achievement (Quin et al., 2015).

Shared decision-making. Within all types of organizations, decisions at all levels of importance need to be made. The structure of the organization determines how decisions are made (Brazer et al., 2010; Johnson, 2017; Rana, 2015). As an element of both transformational leadership and creating partnerships across organizational levels, being included in the decision-making process reinforces the power of collaboration (Lawson et al., 2017).

As part of a larger analysis of high-involvement work practices (HIWP), Rana (2015) provided evidence on the increased engagement of employees who are able to participate in the shared decision-making process within the business sector. Under HIWP, participating in shared decision-making can range from making the final decision to merely providing input (Rana, 2015). Findings indicated that employees feel worthwhile, valuable, and useful when they are able to contribute to the decision-making process. In addition, employee engagement is positively linked to managers who encourage their employees to solve work-related problems and participate actively in decision-making (Rana, 2015). Taken together, it is vital that leaders create opportunities for shared decision-making. Furthermore, leaders need not just encourage, but to expect their followers to get involved in the decision-making process (Rana, 2015).

Aligned with the framework of interprofessional partnerships (Eisler & Potter, 2014) in the health care field, introduced earlier in this chapter, Johnson (2017) analyzed the decision-making process within partnerships/teams. The approach taken by Johnson

was to examine the different frames, or lenses, each member brings to the team. Through these different lenses, alternative solutions can be presented to the group, or person, needing to make a decision (Johnson, 2017). Given the complexity and critical importance of decisions in the health care field, the operation of interdisciplinary teams improves patient care and safety (Johnson, 2017).

In terms of decision-making within school districts, some of the most important decisions are made by the superintendent (Brazer et al., 2010). For a qualitative empirical study, Brazer et al. (2010) set out to determine how superintendents work with stakeholders before making strategic educational decisions around the direction of the school district that impact a large number of students. While the details of the three case studies were different, three key similarities in the shared decision-making processes used by the superintendents were demonstrated in the findings of the study (Brazer et al., 2010). First, all three school districts established committees consisting of representatives from each constituency. Second, while working with his or her committee, each superintendent made at least one key choice during the process that ended up sending the committee down a specific path toward a decision. Third, collaboration with the committee basically ended once decisions were made and the process shifted to the implementation stage (Brazer et al., 2010). While shared decision making at the committee level may end at the decision phase, later sections of the chapter will review the literature on how collaboration continues in the implementation process.

Overall, this section has introduced literature on interactions between members of an organization at different hierarchical levels across the business, health care, and

educational fields. The next section will focus on the close working relationship between

principals and superintendents in K-12 education.

Principal/Superintendent Working Relationship

School districts, much like the corporate system, are organized in a hierarchical

model (Derrington & Larsen, 2012). The superintendent is the top person on the

organizational chart, while the principals are middle managers who are responsible for

individual schools (Derrington & Larsen, 2012). Due to the necessity of interactions

between these two leadership levels, numerous studies have investigated the supports and

barriers to effective working relationships between principals and superintendents. Taken

together, the studies discussed in this section are organized around two categories: trust

and decision-making roles.

Trust between principal and superintendent. As the literature in this subsection

will introduce, trust is fundamental to interactions between individuals. While there is a

level of assumed trust between members of an organization, interactions around shared

goals and feedback can build or diminish trust. Also, trust takes time to form between

members of an organization (Daly et al., 2015; Hvidston et al., 2015; Lawson et al., 2017;

Walker et al., 2011).

The establishment of trust across staff boundaries within a school district has been

shown to increase student achievement (Lawson, et al., 2017). These boundaries include

central office and school building leadership. In an era of ever-changing policy

implementations imposed on school districts, Lawson et al. (2017) conducted a study on

nine elementary schools with a similar percentage of economically disadvantaged

students and English language learners (ELL). Of these nine schools, a subset of six were

coined *odds-beating schools* because they fell at least one standard deviation above the state average on the Common Core State Standards ELA and Math assessments in grades 3-5. Trust was established over time and became an imbedded norm within the odds-beating schools, regardless of district size. The research team derived two important findings around the concept of trust. First, relational trust in odds-beating elementary schools was a recurring theme as participants were asked how the school operates and why it is effective. Second, participants consistently described trust between superintendent-principal and superintendent-teachers or other school professionals, which the researcher named *reciprocal trust*. As Lawson et al. (2017) found in their extensive study, a key factor in the establishment of a partnership between the principal and superintendent is a solid foundation of trust.

While Lawson et al. (2017) incorporated a comparison of urban, suburban, and rural schools as part of their research methodology, Thompson and France (2015) decided to focus on the relationship between building leaders and district leaders within only suburban districts. Interestingly, this is the only empirical study in this literature review that solely studied suburban districts. It is this gap in the literature that fueled Thompson and France's (2015) study, which used a previous study that found five successful urban research-based district leadership practices (Honig et al., 2010). Thompson and France (2015) were looking to see if the working relationship between suburban leaders followed the same five practices as their urban colleagues. From their findings, only three of the five practices emerged in their study: (a) principal partnership, (b) district stewardship, and (c) district partnership. For the purposes of this section on trust between principals and superintendents, district stewardship and district partnership

will not be discussed. Within aspects of *principal partnership*, district leaders showed

levels of trust by brokering external resources to buildings and allowing principals the

opportunity to serve as resources to one another. As part of the conclusion to their

quantitative study, Thompson and France (2015) provided a very relevant suggestion for

further research based on this study; "qualitative studies would help deepen our

understanding of how suburban district leaders and principals perceive and understand

their relationship" (p. 8).

  As an extension to the research on trust between the principal-superintendent pair,

Hvidston et al. (2015) examined the perceptions of principals concerning their

supervisory feedback and evaluation. As a mandate, the evaluation of principals is the

legal responsibility of school districts and school boards (Hvidston et al., 2015). For this

qualitative study, data was collected using two open-ended survey questions describing

the ideal principal evaluation and the effectiveness of principal evaluation and

supervisory feedback on leadership performance. The findings indicated that principals

were expecting competent superintendents to provide specific feedback and opportunities

for professional growth (Hvidston et al., 2015). As an overarching finding of their

research, Hvidston et al. (2015) found that an emphasis on trust between superintendents

and principals created a climate for continued improvement, an effective principal

evaluation, and a strengthening of the partnership.

  While the previously discussed studies had research questions centered on trust as

a positive influence on educational organizations, there is also empirical research on how

trust can be lost within members of an organization. While there is a certain level of

initial trust that exists within working relationships, sustained trust is not guaranteed

(Walker et al., 2011). Shifting from a positive lens on trust in educational organizations, Walker et al., (2011) examined the fragile nature of trust in school settings.

Relevant to this literature review discussing the working relationship between principals and superintendent, the most frequently mentioned trust-related problems from principals involved central office administration interfering with building-level issues. Placing this finding into the larger conversation around the trust between principal and superintendent, both members of the pair need to be aware of the relatively high fragility of trust that comes with their working relationship.

Using a different view on trust, Daly et al. (2015) explored the role trust, climate, and efficacy play when there are negative relationships between educational leaders. From their review of the literature, Daly et al. (2015) found that most network studies, both in and out of education, focused on productive relationships. For this reason, there is a lack of empirical evidence on the causes of negative relationships among district leaders and principals. From their data analysis, Daly et al. (2015) found that reporters of negative interactions tended to be district office leaders who perceived less trust in the organization. In contrast, the data showed receivers of negative interactions tended to be building-level leaders who were more likely to perceive a more trusting environment before receiving the report. As a possible explanation, Daly et al. (2015) recognized the higher frequency of opportunities for collaboration between building personnel and building leadership, as compared to building personnel and district leadership. Trust-building opportunities, through collaboration, occur more often between principals and building staff. To maintain a trusting relationship between district and building leaders, it

is critical to have an awareness of the imbalance of trust that can form between building staff and superintendent (*outsider*) and building staff and principal (*insider*).

The next section introduces studies that examined the concept of principal autonomy within the context of schools and the districts they serve. Connected to the concept of trust, several studies found that positive trust fosters the type of working relationship where superintendents allow for principals to have autonomy. While it may seem that principal autonomy is a contradiction to a working relationship between principal and superintendent, the next section will describe the empirical research that examines the role of principal autonomy in the working relationship between the leadership pair.

Decision-making roles. As middle managers, principals do not decide where their decision-making power starts and ends (Chang et al., 2015; Walker et al., 2011). The degree of a principal's power to make decisions without oversight from district office—his or her autonomy—rests with the superintendent (Chang et al., 2015).

In an era of high-stakes testing, principals are faced with increased pressures that may negatively impact commitment to their school and their job satisfaction (Chang et al., 2015). Chang et al. (2015) performed a quantitative empirical study to examine how the level of perceived autonomy granted to them by their superintendent affected the commitment to their school and their job satisfaction. From the findings, when a principal perceived his or her superintendent as being supportive in granting autonomy, that principal was more invested in the district and more satisfied with her job. Interestingly, when examining a principal's commitment to his or her school district, there was an inverse relationship between perceived autonomy support and relative experience with

the district. The perceived autonomy support from superintendents was more strongly related in principals with less experience (Chang et al., 2015). The increase in investment and job satisfaction, especially with newer principals, was due to an increase in self-confidence and a high level of trust from superiors (Chang et al., 2015). Based on the findings of this research study, it is advantageous for superintendents to be aware of the positive effects perceived autonomy has on his or her principals, especially those principals newer to the position.

While Chang et al. (2015) based their study on principals across various-sized districts, other studies focus on the urban setting. To illustrate the level of influence a superintendent can have on a large urban school district, West et al. (2014) published a study that compared the very different leadership styles of two superintendents, both of whom had led the same school district at different time periods. To determine the findings of their research, principal responses were compared to the recurring theme around accountability, autonomy, and stress (West et al., 2014). In terms of accountability, the first set of responses painted a picture of principals being micromanaged, as compared to the second set of responses. In terms of autonomy, principal autonomy was scarce in the first set of responses due to the fact that decision-making power rested solely with the superintendent. By comparison, the second superintendent infused autonomy into the school district in two ways: (a) personal leadership and (b) district reorganization by introducing five regional superintendents. Lastly, in terms of stress, the principal responses from the first set of interviews indicated a much higher level of stress when compared to those same principals under the new superintendent.

To study the constraints on the concept of principal autonomy, Weiner and Woulfin (2016) examined the concept they termed *controlled autonomy,* which refers to the ability of a principal to make school-based decisions while being accountable to district oversight. In particular, Weiner and Woulfin (2016) focused on the perception of controlled autonomy from the lens of novice principals working in school districts that have decided to use principles of autonomy as mechanisms for improvement. Once obtained, the principal perception data were grouped into the four categories of district level activities that incorporate controlled autonomy: operations, instruction, advocacy, and vision (Weiner & Woulfin, 2016). Novice principals held mental frameworks that operations, advocacy, and vision should be shifted toward a higher balance of district control. Conversely, the shared mental framework of novice principals was that instructional decisions should be shifted towards school autonomy (Weiner & Woulfin, 2016). The mindset of the principals was that instructional decisions should be made using the strengths and weakness of their students and staff. As a school's leader, principals hold that critical knowledge (Weiner & Woulfin, 2016). The overall findings of this study suggested that both members of the principal-superintendent pair should determine where principal autonomy is more advantageous and where district control is more appropriate.

Aligned with the findings of Weiner and Woulfin (2016), a comparison study by Forner et al. (2012) also found that in rural districts, the district's vision should come from the superintendent and not the principals. In an era of accountability in education, the meta-analysis of effective superintendent leadership practices, conducted by Waters and Marzano (2006), provided valuable information to school districts. To extend the

research, Forner et al. (2012) researched whether rural schools mirrored the six leadership practices of Waters and Marzano (2006) or deviated from them. When comparing the findings of the study on rural superintendents with that of Waters and Marzano's (2006) six correlates, Forner et al. (2012) found that five were similar. For the purposes of this review, two of the comparisons are worth noting: one of the similar findings and the dissimilar finding. Waters and Marzano's leadership finding of *providing defined autonomy to principals* was consistent to the findings of Forner et al. (2012). Rural schools facilitate a close working relationship that is characterized as "intimate, immediate, and informal" due to their relatively small staff size (Forner et al., 2012, p. 8). Principals and superintendents have access to each other with greater frequency and duration compared to larger districts (Forner et al., 2012). Due to this special relationship, the rural superintendents in this study displayed a willingness to support principal autonomy. Conversely, the effective rural leadership practice that did not align with Waters and Marzano's finding was around goal setting. In the rural study, goals were established by the superintendent and shared with staff in a more personal manner, likely due to close proximity and accessibility to staff.

Also in alignment with the findings of Weiner and Woulfin (2016) concerning principal autonomy for instructional decisions, Honig (2012) examined how executive-level district office staff can support the principals' development as an instructional leader. Taken together, the findings detailed the best practices for providing job-embedded supports for principals' development as instructional leaders. As an example, within the practice of *joint work*, district office support should start with principal-generated questions or jointly negotiated problems of practice. Additionally, within the

practice of *differentiation,* district office support should be principal-specific and evolve

throughout the entire year (Honig, 2012). While these urban school districts had a layer

of district office personnel assigned to support principals in their instructional leadership,

the concept of supporting principals needs to be a vision of the superintendent.

While instructional decisions involving curriculum and pedagogy are critical for

effective educational leaders, no decision is as important and long-lasting as teacher

staffing (Engel & Curran, 2015). Since the 1980s, hiring decisions have shifted

substantially towards the building level, so much so that most United States principals are

now the primary decision maker in teacher hiring decisions (Engel & Curran, 2015).

Engel and Curran (2015) explained that the increase in hiring decisions at the principal

level is associated with the larger shift toward site-based management. After completing

the interviews, 10 hiring practices were coded as being strategic (Engel & Curran, 2015).

In terms of the spectrum of frequencies across the 10 practices, 83% of principals

indicated that they take referrals from outside of district, while only 24% of principals

begin hiring in March or earlier. On average, principals reported engaging in five of the

10 hiring practices. Added data analysis found that over a quarter of principals sampled

engaged in three or fewer practices (Engel & Curran, 2015). Taken together, this broad

range of hiring practices sheds light on a potential concern around principal autonomy.

Without some level of district oversight, the process around the most important decision

in a district, the hiring of teachers, becomes too inconsistent.

Overall, six empirical studies (Chang et al., 2015; Engel & Curran, 2015; Forner

et al., 2012; Honig, 2012; Weiner & Woulfin, 2016; West et al., 2014) presented findings

around the concept of principal autonomy and how it is related to district office oversight.

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Analyzed together, three common elements emerged from these studies. First, the superintendent decides the level of autonomy granted to the building principals. Within the studies, district size, principal experience, and the level of trust between principal and superintendent played a role in the autonomy granted. Second, principals having autonomy is advantageous to a district. The district office can be more efficient when building principals are able to make site-based decisions (Forner et al., 2012). In addition, principals have a higher satisfaction with their job, which results in a positive influence on school climate (Chang et al., 2015). Third, broad principal autonomy is not optimal due to the need for superintendent, or district office, support and collaboration. While the principal is the school leader, each principal cannot work in a silo in a district made up of multiple schools. The superintendent's vision must be integrated into the direction of each school. Aligned with district visions, superintendents must incorporate a greater emphasis on student performance due to increased accountability standards. The next section introduces empirical studies on leadership approaches in implementing federal regulations over the last 20 years.

Accountability

Since 2001, NCLB and ESSA have caused a much greater emphasis on student achievement on high-stakes tests. For that reason, school and district leaders have had to shift the mindset towards preparing students for these assessments. This section will analyze three empirical studies, in chronological order, that focused on how federal laws have shaped educational leadership around increased accountability and high-stakes testing (Crum et al., 2009; Marsh et al., 2017; Printy & Williams, 2015).

As educational leaders, principals and superintendents have had to evolve following the implementation of 2001's NCLB Act. The researchers Crum et al. (2009) identified a gap in the empirical research focusing on best practices used by principals who have successfully navigated the new areas of accountability. The team sought to gain knowledge from successful principals on how they were able to sustain high levels of student success, aligned to the requirements of NCLB. From analyzing the data, Crum et al. (2009) sorted their findings into five themes. First, successful leadership decisions were driven by, and supported with, data. Second, the leader-follower relationship needed to be anchored in honesty and transparency. Third, effective principals fostered a sense of ownership of decisions in their followers and celebrated collaboration with them. Fourth, in addition to fostering ownership, successful leaders recognized and developed leaders within the organization. Last, principals needed to have a strong instructional awareness and a willingness to be involved in the instructional process (Crum et al., 2009).

Interestingly, several of the details embedded within these five themes mirror the findings of the empirical studies on the principal/superintendent working relationship. For instance, successful principals established trusting relationships with both district office personnel and their building staff. Due to the potential for increased levels of stress and anxiety that accompany increases in accountability, trusted relationships play a key role in navigating the accountably shift (Crum et al., 2009). As another example, principals spoke about the importance of being aware of, and involved in, daily instruction via walk-throughs. This level of involvement provides evidence to the principal as he or she develops decisions around curriculum and instruction. The findings of the study focus mostly on successful principal practices for leading schools through a

changing era in education. However, the study themes also connect to the district office because accountability also exists at the district office level.

While Crum et al. (2009) used NCLB as the catalyst for their research questions, Printy and Williams (2015) investigated how the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 impacted educational leadership. As a result of the reauthorization of IDEA, school principals were encouraged to use Response to Intervention (RTI) as a support for students behind grade level. Printy and Williams (2015) conducted a qualitative study to determine the various messages about and conditions on RTI that principals receive and to which they pay closer attention when making decisions about implementation for mathematics and literacy. Using grounded theory, Printy and Williams' (2015) first level of analysis of the responses yielded two main categories: (a) the principals' perceptions related to support for RTI and (b) organizational conditions that influenced implementation. Further analysis led to the key finding that the message relayed by the superintendent about RTI's value was a key factor in the success of effective RTI implementation. In districts where the superintendent chose not to advance a vision for RTI as a proper solution for improving achievement, the principal received no guidance from the superintendent on this issue. This disconnect between the principal and superintendent affected both data monitoring and teacher accountability, which are important for effective RTI implementation. Effective principal-superintendent working relationships require a partnership of understanding. Compliance with the requirements of RTI is an expectation at the principal level, but ultimately rests at the top level if not implemented correctly.

Considering that ESSA only became a law in December of 2015, it is still too early for comprehensive empirical studies on the impact of ESSA for educational leaders. Fortunately, the state of California was forward thinking and authorized six CORE (California Office of Reform Education) waiver districts, allowing them the opportunity to implement an ESSA-like system starting in the 2012-2013 school year. Marsh et al. (2017) determined how districts are implementing and responding to the new accountability systems. Specifically, Marsh et al. (2017) studied the attitudes of educators regarding the newly developed system, the implementation process, the supports and barriers, and the current outcomes after 3 years of implementation. In their findings, they found an overall strong buy-in from district and school administrators, in large part due to the conceptual shift toward social-emotional skills/learning, fair academic growth measures, a focus on support, and peer-to-peer communication. In terms of implementation, reciprocity was a common challenge across the six districts as was the level of collaboration at the school and district levels. With regard to intermediate outcomes for the elements of the CORE work, the six districts are making progress but have not fully achieved the CORE vision. Collectively, these findings support the importance of an effective working relationship between building and district leadership.

Overall, three empirical studies (Crum et al., 2009; Marsh et al., 2017; Printy & Williams, 2015) presented findings regarding the ever-changing accountability placed on educational leaders. Two common elements emerged from an analysis of these studies. First, the increased level of accountability has not occurred in isolation at the school level. Both principals and superintendents have had to adjust in their roles. Building principals have had to shift from building managers to instructional leaders by overseeing

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curricular alignment, instructional shifts, and intervention programs (Printy & Williams, 2015). Superintendents have had to shift from visionary to facilitator by transforming strong external demands into internal action (Printy & Williams, 2015). Second, the effectiveness of implementing programs to support student learning is directly linked to district level support (Crum et al., 2009). The next section of this chapter will discuss research on higher education leadership preparation programs and the evaluation process of sitting principals and superintendents.

Leadership Development

The two main phases in the formal development of school and district leaders are the phases preceding and following the taking on of a leadership role. Before becoming either a principal or superintendent, candidates need to complete advanced training through an administrative certification program. Once in a principal or superintendent role, individuals are evaluated to determine leadership growth and effectiveness (Hvidston et al., 2016; Moffett, 2011). Intertwined in both leadership training and leadership growth are nationally developed and respected leadership standards.

The first part of the section that follows is a summary of the specific standards from the most updated version of school leadership standards, the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL), that includes interactions between leveled leaders (NPBEA, 2015). The second part of the section examines studies focused on the development of school leadership preparation programs (Lehman et al., 2014; Young et al., 2016; Young & Perrone, 2016). Lastly, this section discusses studies that examine the evaluation process of principals and superintendents (Hvidston et al., 2016; Murphy et al., 2017; Williams, 2015; Young & Perrone, 2016).

Principal-superintendent working relationship within PSEL standards. In

1996, the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards were

developed by the Council of Chief State School Officials. These six standards were

designed to provide frameworks for policy, to assist in evaluating school leaders and to

enhance preparation programs in school leadership (NPBEA, 2015; Van Meter &

Murphy, 1997). A revised version of the ISLLC standards was released in 2008. The

most recent version, renamed the Professional Standards of Educational Leaders (PSEL)

(Appendix A), was developed by the National Policy Board for Educational

Administration (NPBEA) (NPBEA, 2015). This board, made up of nine national member

organizations, recognized the need for a substantial update to content and an increase

from six to 10 standards. One key shift with the PSEL standards is a focus on positive

school leadership imbedded within the standards (Murphy et al., 2017).

In examining each of the 10 standards at the component level, with a focus on the

partnership of principals and superintendents, several standards become relevant to this

dissertation study. Incorporated into Standard 1, educational leaders need to collaborate

with members of the school community to develop and promote a vision for the district

(NPBEA, 2015). It is critical that building and district leadership is in alignment with the

vision and mission of the organization (Printy & Williams, 2015). Within Standard 2,

effective educational leaders are described as leading with interpersonal and

communication skills, collaboration, professional relationships anchored in trust and

transparency (NPBEA, 2015). As a key aspect of Standard 6, principals and

superintendents need to hire, develop, and retain effective and caring staff (Engel &

Curran, 2015; NPBEA, 2015). As a key aspect of Standard 9, principals and

superintendents need to have a productive relationship when it comes to the management of the monetary and non-monetary resources of the district (NPBEA, 2015). Lastly, as part of Standard 10, an open line of communication between principal and superintendent around new initiatives, when it comes to school improvement, will assist in managing the policies of change.

      Leadership preparation programs. The 2008 ISLLC standards evolved in 2015 into the current PSEL standards and have provided guidance and alignment for educational leaders in the present. However, neither ISLLC standards nor PSEL standards provide the level of specificity needed for use in developing leadership preparation programs (Young & Perrone, 2016). For this reason, the adopted 2011 Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC) standards were developed, in alignment with the 2008 ISLLC standards, "to guide the content, review, and approval of programs that prepare educational professionals for building- and district-level leadership positions" (Young & Perrone, 2016, p. 3). In the same way that the PSEL standards were a revision of the ISLLC standards in 2015, the 2018 National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) standards (Appendix B), currently in draft form, will officially replace the ELCC standards in 2020. The reason for the 2-year gap in time is the fact that universities need time to develop their leadership programs using the NELP standards before being held accountable to them at the accreditation level (Young & Perrone, 2016; NPBEA, 2017).

      Since the draft of the NELP standards was released in January of 2018, and universities are not required to have them fully implemented until 2020, the relevant literature and empirical research on leadership preparation programs incorporates the

2011 ELCC standards. One such example is a literature review by Tucker, Anderson, Reynolds, and Mawwhinney (2016) that focused on the empirical research and conceptual reviews of the ELCC standards between 2008-2013. From their analysis, Tucker et al. (2016) noted that there was a much larger base of research on the first three standards of the ELCC, as compared to the remaining standards. In addition, they found considerably more evidence in support of the ELCC standards for building-level leadership, compared to district-level leadership.

The research findings of Young et al. (2016) are aligned with the analysis of Tucker et al. (2016) as the findings relate to the comparison of building- leader preparation verse district-level preparation. In their study, Young et al. (2016) examined the success of national accreditation for the 1,093 individual preparation programs using ELCC. When separating these programs into building-level and district- level preparation programs, 34% of the building-level programs were nationally recognized, compared to only 27% of district-level programs.

To examine the overall effectiveness of the ELCC standards for the 1,093 preparation programs, 32% achieved national recognition, 46% required some conditions to be met, and 22% were deemed not nationally recognized (Young et al., 2016). Interestingly, the results of this study helped with the revision of ELCC, now known as the NELP, because the ELCC standards were not providing enough aligned support and guidance to create a reasonable number of high-quality preparation programs (Young et al., 2016).

While Young et al. (2016) focused on the set of standards most commonly used in educational leadership programs, Hackmann (2016) investigated the process of gaining

educational licensure across various states. Due to the limited empirical studies on education leadership around licensure, Hackmann (2016) expanded his research to include licensure programs in the fields of engineering, law, teaching, psychology, and medicine. Hackmann (2016) found a uniform licensure process in the fields of medicine, psychology, and engineering. Specifically, in all three professions, applicants need to fulfill several years of supervised internship and pass a nationally approved professional association exam. Importantly, none of these professions offer an alternative licensure route (Hackmann, 2016). Unlike these professions, Hackmann (2016) "found greater licensure variability in the field of education" (p. 6) across states. Due to various routes to licensure, Hackman (2016) was able to conclude that fully licensed educators had better results and remained in their positions longer compared to teachers with alternative or partial certifications.

Evaluation process of principals and superintendents. Once in leadership roles, principals and superintendents are held accountable for their effectiveness as part of an evaluation process (Hvidston, et al., 2016; Moffett, 2011; Williams, 2015). While the 2008 ISLLC standards or 2015 PSEL standards are not used by all districts for leadership evaluation purposes, the components are imbedded in federal and state policy initiatives (Williams, 2015).

To determine the major themes of principal evaluations, Fuller, Hollingworth and Liu (2015) reviewed various state policies around principal evaluations. From their analysis, five major themes became evident: (a) professional development, with improved student outcomes as a desired result, was guided by principal evaluations; (b) most states used principal evaluations to drive high-stakes decision-making; (c) principal evaluations

were linked to student growth on assessments; (d) principal evaluations incorporated direct observations and school climate survey data; and (e) states focused more on the details of the evaluation process rather than the overall purpose (Fuller et al., 2015). While these themes are relevant to the work of the building principal, they fall short of capturing the overall larger framework of the principalship (Williams, 2016).

To gather perception data on how to make principal evaluations more accurate, inclusive, and an artifact for continuous improvement, Hvidston et al. (2016) surveyed 102 principals from all levels of K-12 education. Principals valued the interactions with their superintendents around professional growth goals and building initiatives around student engagement and instruction. In addition, principals appreciated the fact that they had input into their own evaluations. Lastly, novice principals (0-3 years of experience) valued the evaluation feedback more than experienced principals. As an implication of their findings, Hvidston et al. (2016) encouraged superintendents to reflect and refine their current evaluation process to incorporate frequent opportunities for principal input on the details of the evaluation that will yield feedback. In addition, leadership preparation programs would benefit from emphasizing the best practices of receiving and giving evaluations.

In shifting to the evaluation of superintendents, it is interesting to note that while the evaluation of superintendents is a requirement by statute, specific criteria for evaluations do not exist (Glass, 2007; Moffett, 2011). Some commonalities in criteria among the research related to this dissertation study on the working relationship between principals and superintendents include influencing the direction of teaching and learning, establishing a vision, and leading personnel (Glass, 2007; Moffett, 2011).

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In a similar trend with principal evaluations, superintendents are currently held more accountable to student achievement measures on high-stakes tests and overall student performance as an aspect of the evaluation process (Glass, 2007; Moffett, 2011). Using the data from 10-year reports and mid-decade reviews, released by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), the number of superintendents earning "excellent" on their evaluation dropped from 69.1% to 59.4% in a 5-year span (Glass, 2007). Similar to Glass' findings noting a decrease in superintendent ratings due to student performance, Moffett (2011) observed an increased emphasis on student achievement in her longitudinal study that used perception data over an 11-year period. Posed to both superintendents and board presidents in 1989 and 2010, participants were asked to what extent student achievement is utilized in formal superintendent evaluations. For superintendents, the perception that student achievement was incorporated to a "great extent" rose from 3% in 1989 to 22% in 2010. For school board presidents, this same percentage rose from 7% in 1989 to 25% in 2010. Even with a trend toward increased accountability linked to student achievement, an interesting commonality between the analyses by Glass (2007) and Moffett (2011) was that superintendents were in support of how they were evaluated by their boards. Over 90% of superintendents surveyed felt their evaluation process was "very fair" or "fair" (Glass, 2007). Moffett (2011) concluded that superintendents understand the need for leadership focused on student achievement.

Overall, this section has introduced literature on the development of leaders within the field of education, both in the preparation process and the reflective process through evaluations. Clearly, the field of educational leadership development is anchored by national standards, including ISLLC, PSEL and ELCC as frameworks (Fuller et al.,

2015; Hvidston et al., 2016; Williams, 2015). While the articles on superintendent evaluations did not directly reference the national standards, the common criteria used to establish evaluations were aligned with various national standards (Glass, 2007; Moffett, 2011). The last section of this chapter will introduce two successfully defended doctoral theses that utilized West and Derrington's (2009) leadership teaming framework.

West and Derrington Framework in Doctoral Studies

The working relationship between principal and superintendent has been researched in numerous educational journals. For her dissertation, Howard (2014) researched what high school principals need from their superintendents. To draw on previous research on the principal relationship with his or her superintendent, she utilized West and Derrington's (2009) four components of the principal-superintendent relationship as the basis of her conceptual framework. For the data analysis of the interviews with five principals and five superintendents, Howard (2014) established West and Derrington's (2009) four components as her predetermined list of codes.

As stated by the superintendents in Howard's (2014) study, the principalship is the most significant and high-profile leadership position in their districts. Therefore, findings of a study on what principals need from their superintendent is worth noting. The most common need is professional courtesy from their superintendent. Expanded, professional courtesy means principals have the opportunity to provide input to the superintendent and have the superintendent value that input due to the expertise and on-the-ground experience of the principal. In addition to principals' need for opportunities to provide input, principals want to be heard. When superintendents listen to principals, the result is that superintendents then make decisions aligned with the input of principals

when appropriate (Howard, 2014). Lastly, principals expressed the need for trust in their superintendent through collaboration and communication.

Aligned with the concept of trust between principal and superintendent, Kellogg (2017) researched the factors that build and sustain a relationship of trust between these two educational leadership positions. As a justification for her dissertation topic, Kellogg (2017) incorporated West and Derrington's (2009) four components of the principal-superintendent relationship into her research problem and significance of the problem. She emphasized the complex, but important, relationship between principals and superintendents while stating that while West and Derrington (2009) included the concept of trust, they had not expanded far enough to provide evidence of how it is built and sustained. After analyzing the data from 16 interviews, she concluded that the most important factor in establishing and sustaining a trusting relationship between principals and superintendents was open, honest and transparent communication across all aspects of the leadership roles (Kellogg, 2017).

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented research to provide an understanding of the complexity of the working relationship between leveled leaders, both inside and outside the educational field. The review began with an analysis of organizational partnerships in the fields of business, health care, and education. Along with the introduction of various partnership models, the influence of transformational leadership and shared decision-making highlighted the purposeful collaboration needed to foster partnerships across managerial levels (Daly et al., 2015; Hvidston et al., 2015; Lawson et al., 2017; Walker et al., 2011).

In summary, effective principal-superintendent pairs are able to *establish* trust in each other through interactions and *display* trust as part of the decision-making process.

New regulations associated with federal and state educational reforms have increased accountability in the educational system over the last 16 years. The section on accountability analyzed, chronologically, three studies focused on how federal laws have shaped educational leadership since NCLB in 2001 (Crum et al., 2009; Marsh et al., 2017; Printy & Williams, 2015). While suburban school districts may not have been held accountable to all subgroups under NCLB, the changes in ESSA have created more of a focus on accountability to subgroups within suburban districts (NYSED, 2018).

After examining accountability, this chapter then presented research on the training and evaluation of educational leaders. First, studies were shared on the various leadership standards used in the creation of effective preparation programs. Then, studies were shared that examined how leaders are assessed for continuous improvement using both the 2008 Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards and the Professional Standards of Educational Leaders (PSEL).

Finally, the chapter concluded with two dissertations that effectively used West and Derrington's (2009) four components of an effective principal-superintendent working relationship as either a foundation in a justification for the study (Kellogg, 2017) or the framework for data analysis (Howard, 2014).

The next chapter describes the research methodology of this qualitative study that will be used to gather principal and superintendent perception data on the working relationship between this leadership pair.

Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology

Introduction

The positions of school principal and district superintendent are critical to the educational organizations they serve (Cooley & Shen, 2000; Myers & Murphy, 1995; Onorato, 2013). While each leadership position has its own roles and responsibilities, it is the interactions between principals and their superintendents that most influence the organization (Lawson et al., 2017; West & Derrington, 2009). Educational organizations are negatively impacted when principals and superintendents are not in alignment with the vision and initiatives of the organization (Printy & Williams, 2015). In addition, a lack of opportunities for collaboration between principal and superintendent results in principals as middle managers. Lack of collaboration also results in principals' limited trust towards the superintendent and feelings of being undervalued in their roles within the organization (Chang et al., 2015; Eisler & Potter, 2014; Lawson et al., 2017; Rana, 2015).

This study examined the complex working relationship between suburban principal-superintendent pairs who acknowledge a relationship that is, in part, an established partnership. The West and Derrington framework (2009) guided the following research questions for this study:

1. How do principals and superintendents in suburban districts develop, maintain and repair aspects of a partnership, or non-hierarchical working relationship?

2. How does a partnership between principals and superintendents in suburban

   districts contribute to organizational effectiveness and accountability?

Discovering answers to these questions was the focus for the research methodology,

research participants, interview protocol, and data analysis.

Methodology

To gather the data needed to answer the research questions, a qualitative research

design was used, anchored in the phenomenological approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), phenomenological research methods result in

being able to consolidate numerous individual experiences of a shared phenomenon into

"a description of the universal essence" (p.75). Specific to this study, the researcher

obtained perception data on the phenomenon that is the complex relationship between

principal-superintendent pairs using dyadic (pair) interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018,

Morgan, 2016).

Following qualitative research methods, a small number of participants provided

in-depth perception data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Important to this dissertation study,

participants were suburban principal-superintendent pairs who work in the same district.

Each principal-superintendent pair was interviewed, on-site, using a semi-structured

interview protocol (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Dyadic interviews. The goal of having dyadic interviews "is to engage two

participants in a conversation that provides the data for a research project" (Morgan,

2016, p. 9). When using the correct dyadic pair, each participant becomes more engaged

due to their interest in what each other has to say (Morgan, 2016). Two research areas

have utilized dyadic interviews more than others; marketing research and family studies. Such examples are buyer-seller dyads and partnered couples (Morgan, 2016).

Unlike common individual interviews, dyadic interviews provide an additional layer of data owing to the interactions that occur between the two participants (Morgan, 2016). Additionally, differences in interactive dynamics regarding "rapport" are worth noting (Morgan, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2011). For the most effective interview with an individual, a feeling of rapport must be established between the interviewer and the participant. "In contrast, it is the rapport between the two participants that is critical in dyadic interviews" (Morgan, 2016, p. 17)

When comparing dyadic interviews to focus groups, it is important to note that the dyadic interview is not simply a miniature focus group (Morgan, 2016). In a dyadic interview, each participant is generally given more time to speak and the interactions between participants are more profound. Also, dyadic interviews have a greater possibility of becoming less structured due to free-flowing conversations between the pair. This type of free-flowing interaction is less common in larger focus groups (Morgan, 2016).

It does need to be noted that there can be an imbalance of power and/or status between the participants in each dyad due to hierarchy within the organization (Morgan, 2016). The researcher needed to be aware of this reality when making observations during the interview and when analyzing the interview transcripts. While there may have been a concern interviewing a boss-subordinate pair, the selection criteria for this study reduced that concern because both participants already described their working relationship, individually with the researcher, as a partnership within a hierarchical

system (Morgan, 2016). When speaking with principals as part of the process for selecting participants, the researcher explained the research methodology and confirmed that principals are comfortable participating in dyadic interviews alongside their superintendent. To assess the validity of the decision made by the researcher to have boss-subordinate pairs, a one-question post-interview survey was given, via email, to each participant to determine his or her level of comfort during the dyadic interview (Appendix C).

Research Context

This dissertation study examined the working relationship between suburban principals and their superintendents within school districts in Mason County, New York (pseudonym). Mason County includes a large urban school district but due to the complex leadership structure that exists within large urban districts, the urban district was not included in this dissertation study (Honig, 2012; West et al., 2014). The remaining 17 suburban school districts ranged in student population from 655 students to 11,254 students (NYSED, 2017). These 17 school districts employed a superintendent for the district and a principal for each school.

When comparing state report card data for 2006-2007 and 2016-2017, there was a significant population shift in Mason County suburban schools regarding the percentage of students classified as economically disadvantaged. The shift included an increase in 15 of the 17 school districts, ranging from an increase of 18% to an increase of 175% (NYSED, 2018). The substantial increase in the percentage of students classified as economically disadvantaged contributed to a study on the working relationship between principals and superintendents in suburban districts. The increase in subgroup numbers

limited the ability of suburban schools to potentially mask subgroup performance and may require superintendents and principals to be even more vigilant in reviewing student performance data for all students (Marsh et al., 2017).

In addition to the organization of school districts within Mason County, it is relevant to share additional information about Mason County that impacts student populations within the school districts. As the 9th most populated county in NYS, Mason County has a population of 747,727 people with a median age of 38.7 (Data USA, 2018). The median household income is $54,492 and the median property value is $143,100 (Data USA, 2018). In terms of industry, Mason County is the home of four world headquarters across various fields (Data USA, 2018). With regard to higher education institutions, Mason County is home to nine universities and colleges ("New York State," 2018).

Research Participants

Each of the 17 potential suburban districts for this study in Mason County, NY has a superintendent and one principal per school. Before using selection criteria, the numbers of potential participants for this study were 17 superintendents and 116 principals. One of the districts was eliminated due to a potential bias.

To determine research participants from the 16 remaining school districts, purposeful sampling criteria were used to determine principal-superintendent dyads. First, each member of the interview pair reported, to the researcher, whether their working relationship could be defined as a partnership, as defined by the researcher using the research literature. Second, the principal had successfully earned tenure in the role of principal (Chang et al., 2015; Hvidston et al., 2016; Weiner & Woulfin, 2016). Third, to

enable school level as a variable for analysis, the selected principals represented leaders from at least one elementary, middle school, and high school setting.

The procedure of obtaining willing participants was a two-step process. First, the superintendents from the 16 identified districts were contacted via email by the researcher (Appendix D). While the initial email resulted in four interested superintendents, follow-up phone calls were used to obtain the remaining two districts for the study. After interest had been established, a phone conversation resulted in the identification of potential principal participants by the superintendent using the criteria for this study. Once the principals had been identified, the researcher determined which principals to contact via email (Appendix E). Having the researcher select the principal took the responsibility off the superintendent for principal selection. In total, six principal-superintendent pairs (n=6) participated in this dissertation study. Six interview pairs in a qualitative phenomenological study is an acceptable sample size (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Instruments Used in Data Collection

For participants' convenience, each dyadic interview took place at an agreed-upon location within their school district. By conducting the interviews within the district, the total time commitment for the superintendent and principal was as reasonable and convenient as possible.

Interview protocols. The interview protocol, as shown in Appendix F, is organized as a semi-structured interview, with specific questions posed to all principal-superintendent pairs, with the option to probe further depending on where the conversation led (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Probing questions signaled to participants the level of depth for the study, and as the interview progresses,

the need for probing questions decreased (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Prior to beginning the interview, the protocol briefly described the study, the selection process, and how the interview data would be collected and used while protecting the privacy of participants in coding responses. In addition to a signed consent form and in conjunction with the interview protocol, which was offered to participants in hard copy form, a table aligning interview questions with research questions and the West and Derrington framework was outlined to ensure both research questions were addressed (Appendix G).

Interview memos. Each dyadic interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. To gather the full depth of each response, the interviews were digitally recorded using two audio recording devices and transcribed for accuracy and authenticity. In addition, the researcher recorded brief notes throughout the interview to capture observations made. When appropriate, the time on the recording device was noted to correlate the observation with the recording.

Researcher connection. As the researcher is the means by which the qualitative data is filtered, the validity of the research findings increases when the researcher clarifies his or her biases (Creswell, 2014). The researcher in this study had been serving as a school principal for 5 years and worked in the same building as his superintendent. As part of their professional relationship, the researcher and his superintendent collaborated daily on all aspects of building and district leadership decisions. For that reason, the researcher frequently engaged in reflection throughout the study to manage biases towards the literature review process, interview observations and data analysis.

Validation strategies. Qualitative studies, with validation strategies built into the research design, have a high level of credibility (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This research

study had four validation strategies included in the research design. First, the interview protocol questions were piloted with a principal-superintendent pair to establish the content validity of the questions (Creswell, 2014). After completing the pilot interview, the participants had the opportunity to provide feedback to the researcher. In addition, the responses were analyzed to determine if data were obtained for each part of the two research questions for this study. Second, member checking was utilized by the researcher, in the form of communicating with participants, for accuracy and clarity when questions arose about the meaning of responses provided (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Third, interrater reliability was applied at the end of the first cycle coding process (Saldaña, 2016). Specifically, the researcher had another person, with a similar background in the field of education, read portions of transcript text and compare various coding decisions made. Fourth, each participant was given a one-question survey (Appendix C) to gather perception data on the level of comfort answering questions alongside their co-worker. Taken together, these validation techniques supported the credibility of the findings in this study (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Ethical Guidelines and Confidentiality

The procedures for this study were presented to, and approved by, the St. John Fisher College Institutional Review Board prior to implementation. Each interview was structured in the same format, beginning with a review of the purpose of the research. As part of the interview protocol, an overview of the study was verbally communicated. In addition, all participants were informed that they could end their participation at any time during the interview.

To ensure confidentially, participants were informed that their name and school would not be connected to any specific comments or conclusions articulated in this study, as pseudonyms were created for all participants. Also, each pair was reminded that other principal-superintendent pairs were being interviewed for this study. In addition, each interview pair was asked to keep the conversation confidential to parties outside of the dyad. Further, participants were told that interview content, audio recordings, transcripts, and other research material would only be accessed by the researcher. Lastly, as part of agreeing to participate in the study, each participate signed the Informed Consent Form (Appendix H).

To ensure confidentiality of the material data collected, all digital audio recordings and transcriptions of interviews were maintained using a private, locked, and password-protected file and password-protected computer stored securely in the private home of the principal researcher. Electronic files included assigned identity codes and pseudonyms; they did not include actual names or any information that could personally identify or connect participants to this study. Other materials, including notes or paper files related to data collection and analysis, were stored securely in unmarked boxes, locked inside a cabinet in the private home of the principal researcher. Only the researcher had access to electronic or paper records. The digitally recorded audio data will be kept by this researcher for a period of 5 years following publication of the dissertation. Signed informed consent documents will be kept for 5 years after publication. After 5 years, all paper records will be cross-cut shredded and professionally delivered for incineration. Electronic records will be cleared, purged, and destroyed from the hard drive and all devices such that restoring data is not possible.

Data Analysis

Occurring concurrently within the 4-week process of facilitating the dyadic interviews, audio recordings of each interview were replayed to ensure an understanding of participant responses. To be able to analyze the interview responses effectively, the researcher obtained raw transcripts of each interview session and separated the text into the dialogue of each participant. The transcription process took approximately three weeks.

To assist in early analysis of the interview data, the researcher developed a priori codes utilizing prior research findings, West and Derrington's (2009) four components of an effective principal-superintendent working relationship, and the study's research questions (Saldaña, 2016). An example of an a priori code was informal communication.

Following the a priori codes, two cycles of coding were used to increase validity of the findings (Saldaña, 2016). Within the first cycle coding phase, two methods were used. First, emotional coding was used to capture the essence of a study that explores the interpersonal relationship between principal and superintendent (Saldaña, 2016). Critical to effectively using emotional coding is a researcher's "ability to read verbal and non-verbal cues, to infer underlying affects, and to sympathize and empathize with their participants" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 125). As part of coding the transcript, the researcher took field notes and inferences from the audio recording to document emotions witnessed during the actual interview (Saldaña, 2016). As a second form of coding within the first cycle, in vivo coding was used (Saldaña, 2016). In Vivo coding is used to capture the actual words and phrases used by the participants. (Saldaña, 2016). The goal was to

capture the story being told by those experiencing the phenomenon of an effective principal-superintendent partnership.

After completing the two first-cycle coding methods, which initially summarizes segments of the data, a second-cycle method was used (Saldaña, 2016). Pattern coding was used to take the numerous coded segments and place them into a smaller number of categories and concepts that resulted in the larger emergent themes (Saldaña, 2016).

Procedures

The researcher adhered to the following procedures to complete the study:

1. Submitted required information and paperwork for approval from the Institutional Review Board at St. John Fisher College.

2. Utilized purposeful sampling to determine prospective superintendents for the initial email communication (Appendix D)

3. Pilot tested the interview protocol with a principal-superintendent pair before initiating email correspondence with prospective superintendents.

4. Revised and finalized interview questions based on feedback from the pilot interview.

5. Sent introductory emails (Appendix D) to six superintendents.

6. Set up phone conversations to obtain names of principals who fit the following criteria: (a) an effective working relationship from the perspective of the superintendent; (b) at least 2 years working with the superintendent; (c) and 3 years as principal.

7. Sent an introductory email (Appendix E) to the principal participants in the list provided by the superintendents, and followed up with a phone call if no response was received after 3 days.

8. Contacted principal-superintendent pairs by phone or email, as preferred by participants, to schedule the dyadic interview.

9. Facilitated six dyadic interviews using the interview protocol (Appendix F).

10. Obtained transcripts of interview sessions. This step occurred concurrently with step number 9.

11. Using the concept of interrater reliability, shared early coding notes with a research colleague to determine the reliability of coding decisions.

12. Coded interview data using established a priori codes.

13. Completed data analysis.

Chapter Summary

This qualitative study has added to the limited body of literature on the complex working relationship between a principal and his or her superintendent at the level of a partnership. Using a dyadic interview structure, this study focused on how some principal-superintendent pairs develop, maintain, and repair aspects of a partnership and how that partnership contributes to organizational effectiveness and accountability (Morgan, 2016). The application of West and Derrington's (2009) leadership framework through first and second cycle coding of participants' responses provided a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of a partnership that forms between some principal-superintendent pairs.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

Educational leaders at the school and district level have a unique opportunity to influence the students and staff they serve. Even more, when these leaders work in a partnership, their influence may have the potential to extend further. While the literature discussed the advantages of partnerships across leadership levels in the private sector (Kolk et al., 2016), an examination of partnerships in K-12 leadership is lacking. For that reason, the purpose of this study was to gather perspective data from principals and superintendents on their established partnership. The West and Derrington framework (2009) guided the following research questions for this study:

1. How do principals and superintendents in suburban districts develop, maintain, and repair aspects of a partnership, or non-hierarchical working relationship?

2. How does a partnership between principals and superintendents in suburban districts contribute to organizational effectiveness and accountability?

Data Analysis and Findings

Chapter 4 begins with an overview of the demographic profile of the six dyadic interview participants. Dyadic interviews, which are interviews conducted with two participants having a connection to each other, were used to maximize the qualitative data collection process by both, allowing the participants to build off each other's comments and for observations to be made about their interactions with each other. Following the

demographic profile, the process used to analyze the interview data is described. Next, the chapter presents the analysis of each research question by introducing the themes and subthemes that emerged. The chapter concludes with a summary of the research findings.

      Demographic profile of dyadic interview participants. Data for the study were collected using six separate dyadic interviews (n=12) conducted over a three-week period. Each of the interviews occurred in either the superintendent's office or district conference room. The size of the school districts represented ranged from less than 1,000 students to over 10,000. Superintendent experience ranged from 4 years to 14 years. Principal experience ranged from 2 years to 14 years. As dyadic pairs, their time as principal-superintendent teams ranged from 2 to 5 years, as shown in Table 4.1. In terms of the gender profile of the participants, all six principals were male, and the superintendent cohort was comprised of three females and three males. While the researcher did select the participating principals from a larger list of principals supplied by the superintendents, all principals on that larger list were male. Each school level was equally represented by the six principals; two elementary, two middle school, and two high school. Lastly, five of the six superintendents were principals prior to becoming superintendents.

Table 4.1

Superintendent-Principal Pairs

School District	Superintendent	Principal	Years as Principal-Superintendent pair
Lynn School District	Mr. Lamarck	Mr. Libby	3
Elizabeth School District	Mrs. Elion	Mr. Edison	4
Grace School District	Mr. Goodall	Mr. Gibbs	2
A. John School District	Mrs. Jemison	Mr. Joule	4
Douglas School District	Mrs. Darwin	Mr. Dalton	5
Rose School District	Mr. Rutherford	Mr. Ramsay	5

Note: School districts and participant names are pseudonyms.

Analysis procedures. Each superintendent-principal pair participated in a dyadic interview using the protocol in Appendix D to guide the interview. Participant responses to the interview protocol questions were transcribed and coded individually. In total, 80 codes were used across the six transcripts. Early in the coding process, interrater reliability was established by having an outside person, experienced in both K-12 education and the coding process, code a section of a transcript that the researcher had also coded (Saldaña, 2016). By analyzing the codes in their totality, themes and subthemes emerged across all interviews. While there were significant differences in district size and years of experience in the principalship and superintendency, there were many similarities in the shared experiences throughout the interviews as all aspects of the

principal-superintendent partnership were discussed. Within two days following the

dyadic interviews, each participant was emailed a one-question online survey to evaluate

how comfortable they were with answering questions honestly in the presence of their co-

worker. As a confirmation of the data collected, all 12 participants were comfortable

answering the protocol questions honestly in the presence of their co-worker.

Research Question 1: How Did The Partnership Begin, Remain, and Repair?

The protocol questions were aligned to gather data on this research question: How

do principals and superintendents in suburban districts develop, maintain, and repair

aspects of a partnership, or non-hierarchical working relationship? Along with the main

protocol questions, follow-up questions were designed to provide insight into how the

partnership was formed, maintained, and repaired between each principal-superintendent

pair. In the analysis of participant responses, four overarching themes emerged. The first

theme was "trust: you can't see it, you can't touch it, but you know it is there," reflecting

the known, yet hard to explain, existence of trust between members of a partnership. This

theme was then broken down into three additional subthemes because of the complexity

of trust as a concept. The second theme was "communication makes a team strong,"

which highlights various ways that communication flows within the partnerships and also

how critically important communication is. This theme was then broken down into two

additional subthemes. The third theme was "aligned at the core," providing evidence of

shared core beliefs and mindset within the pairs. The fourth theme was "I am not on an

island," pointing to the value of each partnership for those leading schools and districts.

Table 4.2 presents the four themes for this research question, along with the key concept

for each theme. In addition, subthemes are indicated for the first and second theme.

Table 4.2

Research Question 1 – Themes and Key Concepts

Theme	Key Concept	Subtheme
"Trust: you can't see it, you can't touch it, but you know it is there."	Establishing trust is critical	"The hiring process creates a bond"
		"Knowing the principal's chair"
		"Disagreements make us stronger"
"Communication makes a team strong."	Communication is frequent and open	"Communication comes in many forms"
		"Our best meetings are informal meetings"
"Aligned at the core."	Shared values drive the focus	
"I am not on an island."	Collaborative autonomy in both roles	

"Trust: you can't see it, you can't touch it, but you know it is there." Based

on West and Derrington's (2009) framework, it is not surprising that the concept of trust

emerged throughout conversations about the working relationship between principals and

superintendents. The word *trust* was used in all six interviews for a total of 75 times.

Importantly, the word *trust* was said by both principals and superintendents.

Superintendent Rutherford described how trust is aligned to his leadership style in terms

of assumed trust versus earned trust. Instead of allowing trust to form over time through

various situations, called *earned trust,* he has the mindset of *assumed trust*, which is trust in others without interactions with that person. He stated:

> My leadership style is I already trust you. No one has to earn my trust because everyone starts with it. I told the principals on the first day, I already trust you. You can lose my trust but right now you don't have to earn it. Why would they be in the position if they could not be trusted? I was a principal, and I didn't become a principal to body slam the superintendent. I became principal because I thought I could help more kids that way. So, I start off with that as a basic premise and go from there. That's how all relationships are built to me: no matter where they are, whether they're professional or personal, it's all based on trust. (T6, 35-42)

In describing the trust Superintendent Lamarck had for Principal Libby after working together for 3 years, he stated, "you can't see it, you can't touch it, but you know it is there." Explained as a factor in their 14 years working together, which started as fellow building administrators, Principal Joule had a different take on the trust between him and Superintendent Jemison:

> There have been times when I've had a personal or professional situation that I needed to gain another perspective on or just need to talk about. Starting back in 2004, we've been able to have trusting conversations with each other to hear each other's thoughts. This trust goes both ways and has never been broken. I view her [Superintendent Jemison] as probably one of two or three people that I know I can have a frank candid conversation about anything knowing that it's not going to get out and not crush me or crush her. I think that trust has never been broken, which

is why our relationship has kind of blossomed because there's never been a reason not to do that. So naturally over time it gets stronger. (T4, 215-221)

Towards the end of the interview at Rose School District, Principal Ramsay sums up the entire conversation this way, "At the end of the day, I'll tell you this, I trust him and I believe he trusts me. I think that is central to our relationship."

While the previous quotes directly addressed the existence of *trust,* three subthemes help explain how trust develops within the principal-superintendent partnerships. First, the partnership started to form during the hiring process. Second, a bond forms from the shared experience of the complex nature of the principalship. Third, when trust exists, disagreements make the partnership stronger.

"The hiring process creates a bond." Of the six principal-superintendent pairs, five discussed the hiring process as the formation of the partnership. Of those five pairs, four partnerships began with the selection of the principal by the superintendent. Principal Libby reflected, "the partnership started when I was first applying for the principal job." Interestingly, Principal Dalton surprised himself when he realized the link between his selection as principal and their established partnership when he stated:

I never really thought that much about our partnership. I feel like I'm in a really unique position because Superintendent Darwin selected me. So as a principal, you can lack confidence in a lot of areas, but I knew that she saw something in me and I feel like she's always had trust in my judgment. (T5, 18-21)

Superintendent Goodall discussed the unique bond that forms with the people you hire. He noted, "You develop a different relationship with them because they were your hire. It is part of your vision." His principal, Mr. Gibbs, made a point of mentioning the fact that,

"I was Superintendent Goodall's first principal hire in the district." While the other three principals were new to the principalship when they were hired, Principal Edison had 7 years of experience. This past experience played a role in cultivating that initial trust Superintendent Elion had for her principal. She noted, "Principal Edison came to the district with experience, I think 7 years of experience in a smaller district. So he came to the table with experience and, so therefore, credibility."

Conversely, Principal Ramsey and Superintendent Rutherford had a different beginning to their partnership. As the administrative union president, Principal Ramsey was actively involved in the hiring process of Superintendent. So much so, a school board member reached out privately to gather his insight and opinion. Principal Ramsey reflected on the process:

> I was one of the individuals on the interview team to hire Superintendent Rutherford. I feel like I really have always had a vested interest in the position because you hope that you find someone you can work with and have a good relationship with. (T6, 11-13)

As he elaborated further, Principal Ramsey connected their partnership by stating, "I think our relationship is where it is because I've always believed that I've had a vested interest in his success."

What was not captured by the recorder, but was noted by the researcher, was the eye contact and smiles that were consistent when all five of these principal-superintendent pairs discussed the hiring process. Another consistent field note was a sense of pride in the hiring decisions.

"Knowing the principal's chair." One does not truly know the principalship unless you have lived it. The importance of that shared experience was discussed in each of the five interviews where the superintendent had once been a principal. Superintendent Darwin noted:

> I think honestly having been a principal and understanding what happens in schools and in buildings and what it takes to run a building and those types of things has probably given me more credibility with building principals in general, compared to someone who has never worn those shoes. (T5, 126-129)

In Grace School District, Principal Gibbs shared an early story from their evolving partnership when Superintendent Goodall explained what the principalship means to him, as both a former principal and current superintendent. More importantly, Principal Gibbs knew the support was there, anchored in experience. He stated:

> I remember sitting down the day I signed the contract with Superintendent Goodall. He told me how much he values the principalship and how he sees the five principals as the bread and butter of the district. He has shown that time and time again and it's nice that he has been a principal before. It takes a certain type of grit…stuff is coming at you and he has understood that and so you feel respected in your role. This is a privilege to do and to know he's in it with you and has an open door. When you call, you never really get the annoyed sound in his voice. (T3, 542-550)

When describing mentoring opportunities with his superintendent, Principal Libby valued the ability to reach out to his superintendent without appearing incompetent. There is a

level of trust and comfort that exists when he can go to his superintendent for advice on situations that he has likely experienced before:

> Superintendent Lamarck's an absolute gem of a resource for me. I often go to him and say, "hey, what would you do in this situation? How would you deal with this? What have you done in the past?" There's nothing brand new to a principal. Most things have happened before. I want to know and I'm not shy about asking for help or looking for the experience others having from doing the job and being there. (T1, 184-189)

While several of the references to a superintendent's experience were linked to building trust in the partnership as mentoring opportunities for the principal, the conversation between Superintendent Jemison and Principal Joule was different. As co-building administrators for most of their working relationship, much of their discussion on the principalship was on the differences between the elementary and high school principalship. As a former elementary principal, Superintendent Jemison trusts Principal Joule's high school expertise to fill the gaps in her understanding of high school situations. This was evident when decisions were made around cell phone use in the high school:

> The district cell phone policy was born out of the code of conduct committee. Through my conversations with Principal Joule, I was able to learn how great of an impact this decision would be on high school principals because there was not thrilling responses around this change. He has always been good about listening and then asking the right questions. Once a decision is made, he is an advocate in terms of recognizing how that might impact his system and then having proactive

conversations around what are we going to do from a communication perspective

and a support perspective. (T4, 148-156)

This mutualism between Superintendent Jemison and Principal Joule was evident

throughout the dyadic interview.

The common understanding of the principalship, among the five superintendents

with principal experience, was summarized well by Superintendent Lamarck when he

described the principalship as, "a constant high-energy event." Principals are having to

make numerous decisions hourly, both big and small, with a needed awareness of the

underlying political dynamics that exist both inside and outside the school. As articulated

by all five interview pairs where the superintendent was once a principal, having sat in

the principal's chair plays a role in establishing the trust needed in an effective

partnership.

"Disagreements make us stronger." Inevitably, leaders at the building level and

district level are going to have different opinions on how to handle situations. As part of

established principal-superintendent partnerships, these disagreements are healthy and

actually strengthen the partnership. Superintendent Jemison framed the value of small

disagreements in this way:

By having that open dialogue, we have been able to make small repairs before big

ones are needed. It has helped to maintain the partnership through little

disagreements. A quick repair is a quick conversation. If we never disagreed, we

would not grow and part of growth and change and improvement comes from

disagreements. (T4, 185-189)

As a similar mindset, Superintendent Rutherford stated, "conflicts involving disagreements are not all bad. No one likes conflict, but you have to understand it has a purpose in the organization." A common disagreement discussed in three of the interviews was staffing needs at the building level. Superintendent Rutherford shared:

> I think the times that are probably the toughest is when I have to ask Principal Ramsey to give away staffing he worked hard to get. . . . Honestly, I would be disappointed if he didn't push back at me for me wanting to pull a staff member. At the end of the day, there are times another decision can be made and there are times it can't. (T6, 135-141)

In response to this, Principal Ramsey explained his mindset in being able to push back on his direct supervisor:

> I feel comfortable enough to push back on staffing decisions because of our relationship. . . . Even if I don't agree with the final decision, I've had an opportunity to share my perspective and I think he respects me enough to at least listen and consider my take. . . . In the end, I respect and trust him to make the best decision for the district. (T6, 151-165)

In comparing two staffing situations, Superintendent Rutherford shared that in one of those two, Principal Ramsey's comments caused him to shift a staffing decision elsewhere in the district.

As an example of a disagreement on a school rule that existed in one, but not both, middle schools in Lynn School District, Superintendent Lamarck discussed a situation where he and Principal Libby were diametrically opposed on a decision:

Cell phones are a good example of the fact that I trust his ability to read situations and I know enough to know that I'm on the outside now it's not my building anymore but I passionately feel that the cellphone or social media is a tool that we need to nurture and grow and teach kids how to use it when we're not there . . . the point is the point we have a difference. . . . I never thought that I would compromise something that I feel so passionately about but I do it because I trust he was reading the situation that he's managing it if there are doubters or if there are complainers, he's dealing with it. In fact, it probably wins the day with parents more than an open campus at a middle school. (T1, 120-157)

Staying with Lynn School District, the dyad discussed a disagreement at the central office level. Superintendent Lamarck discussed a time when Principal Libby disagreed with one of his staffing decisions:

We were looking at some cuts and there was a social worker we were looking to cut. We have literally 250 kids less than we've had in the past and my mindset was "we don't need the same level of support anymore." That was me being away from the building, being an administrator looking at the ledger and he went along with me for a little bit. He then reached out to his people, learned and understood the actual impacts of it and then came back to me and said this is why this is not going to work. He did it the right way by respectfully disagreeing with my initial recommendation and I have to accept his recommendation because he's on the ground floor and in fact, it was the right decision to keep a consistent social worker on staff. So, my point is that it stems from trust in relationships. (T1, 94-101)

When asked why he felt comfortable pushing back on his superintendent, Principal Libby responded:

> I felt comfortable pushing back because of our conversation on day one when he
> [Superintendent Lamarck] made sure I knew my job is to take care of my building
> and make sure that people are feeling supported and the kids are feeling welcome.
> That trumps everything so he made it clear there will never be a time when I
> shouldn't bring that his attention if there's something that I feel strongly about.
> (T1, 110-115)

While most of the disagreements discussed were recalling decisions that had not been *officially* made yet, Principal Edison shared a time when he made a relatively large decision before consulting with Superintendent Elion. Unfortunately, she disagreed with his decision:

> There was an incident involving the exchange students where it was a learning
> opportunity for me in how many different pieces there are and how I need to
> communicate better before making certain decisions. A teacher had approached
> me about arranging for a foreign exchange trip to occur and it had many more
> moving parts than what I originally anticipated. Very quickly it became 30
> students and 30 students seeking out places for them to stay with our own students
> and then there were transportation issues, food issues and there was a lot involved
> with it. Had I communicated more and differently earlier on, it could have gone a
> certain way but in the absence of that communication it could have gone wrong.
> Now thankfully it didn't, but again it was a it was an opportunity for me to

consider how I might more effectively work with our leadership team. (T2, 212-221)

While Superintendent Elion knew Principal Edison had the best of intentions, her concern was "the district liability attached to 30 foreign exchange students staying with 30 district families." As a point of reflection, both Superintendent Elion and Principal Edison felt the situation created some tension to the partnership while also creating an opportunity for it to grow. They worked through this tension by having open and honest conversations about not just this situation, but how to work together on future decisions. Principal Edison reflected:

> I would say I do a bit more pumping of the brakes now. At the leadership table, just spending some time just talking about all the moving pieces…as situations move forward, now that this is happening, I know how we can all work together by discussing what we can do at that point to minimize risk and make sure the event goes as smoothly as possible. (T2, 260-263)

As a variation to disagreements between the interview participants as building and district leaders, the disagreements discussed by Superintendent Jenison and Principal Joule were anchored in their roles as Superintendent and Administrative Union President. Principal Joule noted:

> One might think that the union president-superintendent relationship could have a negative impact on our relationship, but I think she [Superintendent Jension] and I have always been able to have a professional trusting relationship. While we might disagree about something, we're never doing that publicly and if anything,

it's not necessarily disagreeing, it's just offering a different perspective. (T4, 51-

55)

As additional evidence of their genuine respect for each other, the field notes recorded a

joking banter between Superintendent Jenison and Principal Joule.

Overall, this subsection presented evidence that partnerships require trust to

develop, be maintained, and be repaired. The next theme will present evidence around

communication within these partnerships.

"Communication makes a team strong." From the superintendent's perspective,

Derrington noted that it is critically important for superintendents to be informed about

events at the building level (West and Derrington, 2009). The interview data in this study

reinforced the importance of principals keeping their superintendents in the loop with key

situations. Superintendent Rutherford made this an expectation, "My one simple rule with

my leaders is just don't surprise me. The no-surprise rule is a basic rule of trust." The

same expectation also exists in Grace School District, as shared by Principal Gibbs:

He [Superintendent Goodall] always tells his principals, 'don't surprise me.'

Communicate and that's something that I would guess that I probably do a lot.

Even if it feels like it might be small, I try to have the foresight to say this is small

right now but it could become big if I don't get to it early. I usually will just run

what I'm thinking by him to get his thoughts on it. I probably already solved it in

my head, but I just want to run it by him and I think eight or nine times out of 10

were usually pretty calibrated in the approach. (T3, 154-161)

Aligned with how open communication helps in the decision-making process, Principal

Gibbs extended his point, "In terms of big decisions, I feel like it's so collaborative and

the communication is so frequent . . . and you kind of approach it with a growth mindset." To keep his superintendent aware of key issues, Principal Edison shared that his most effective form of communication with his superintendent comes in the form of emails; "I'll CC, forward, or send Superintendent Elion an email just to kind of keep her aware of the situation."

While the previous quotes directly addressed the importance of open and frequent communication, two subthemes help explain how communication actually occurs within partnerships. First, communication comes in many forms, both during and after school hours. Second, the evolution of the partnership occurs more often through informal meetings.

"Communication comes in many forms." Accessibility to timely and frequent communication is evident in principal-superintendent partnerships. All the pairs shared their communication in the form of text messages, emails, and phone calls, both during the workday and outside work hours. In describing the communication between him and Principal Libby, Superintendent Lamarck stated, "There's phone calls on the weekend, there's text messaging, there's calls at night, there's heads-up so it's a very free-flowing exchange." Stated differently, Principal Gibbs described his communication with Superintendent Goodall as "a pretty fluid communication style." To establish expectations around communication, Superintendent Rutherford shared, "Part of my entry plan was to clarify the boundary around communication. We also revisit it at least once a year. We discuss why you'd call me, why you would email me, and why you text me."

Several of the superintendents shared that phone calls or visits from a principal can be sent right into their office. Superintendent Goodall stated, "I always let my clerical staff know, if it's a principal, let them in. I don't care what's going on." Similarly, Superintendent Elion noted, "He [Principal Edison] knows that when we need to talk, he will call and my assistant will find me immediately.

While text communication can be efficient and effective at sharing a piece of information or opinion, it can also create tension due to a misinterpretation of a message. Such a situation was shared by Principal Gibbs when he recalls a message he received from Superintendent Goodall:

> It was like my first hire and I hadn't started yet. I was really excited because I get to hire my own secretary because there was a retirement. Keep in mind, I had just gone to the board meeting where I got hired and it was a big to-do. So I invite my new hire to the board meeting where she is being voted on for approval so we can celebrate her. Over text, I tell him [Superintendent Goodall] that I invited her, and he replies back "*well what happens if the board doesn't approve?"* I wrote back, "*I am so sorry"!* (T3, 128-135)

Superintendent Goodall adds to the story by explaining how he responded without thinking how Principal Gibbs, just hired, would read into it:

> It was so early in our relationship and I wrote *'no need to apologize'*. I was just being really blunt. I explained that the fanfare at board meetings is only for someone in executive cabinet or cabinet. For other positions, we don't want to presume that the board is going to say yes. It was just a good teachable moment for both of us. I think he learned something and I know I learned something. Here

I am just cleaning my garage in the summer and I just sent back "well, what is to

say she's going to get appointed' and that came across as *why would you make*

that stupid mistake." (T3, 137-145)

As the above discussions around communication show, communication takes

several forms among the partnerships. While frequent communication often builds the

partnership, Superintendent Goodall and Principal Gibbs shared an example of how a

misunderstood conversation could result in a partnership needing to be repaired if not

quickly clarified. What is consistent is the fact that communication flows both ways and

occurs outside the normal workday.

"Our best meetings are informal meetings." While formally scheduled meetings,

ranging from weekly to monthly, occur in all six districts, none of the dyads credited

those formal meetings as a factor in the creation or sustainability of their partnership.

Formal meetings were often described as larger district-wide leadership meetings with

only minimal one-on-one interaction between the principal and superintendent. Important

to this study, informal meetings were also mentioned across the interviews, and these

informal meetings were linked to the partnership. Superintendent Goodall highlighted the

importance of these informal conversations: "We had a lot of discussions, mostly

informally, that have built a bond." These discussions often occur while walking around

the school or standing outside while students are getting off the bus. Principal Libby

described informal meetings in this manner:

Superintendent Lamarck does a good job with walking into buildings so he can be

visible around the district so we see him a lot, not just scheduled meetings but just

coming through. We can talk just about either what's going on that day or what's

been happening. (T1, 38-41)

To extend Principal Libby's perception of their model of communication, Superintendent

Lamarck agreed with his principal, adding:

We have formal meetings monthly, there are informal meetings in between. Our

best meetings are informal meetings. Our formal meetings are when I come with

my folder in my computer and ask the questions that we need to ask that are

relative to strategic planning. The functional aspects of being a principal, for the

most part, occur during the informal meetings. (T1, 45-49)

Unique to the partnership between Superintendent Jemison and Principal Joule is

their length of time working in the same district in various roles. In describing their

informal meetings, Superintendent Jenison stated:

I think there's just been a lot of opportunities for us to connect and build

relationships and trust so and again we we've worked together as colleagues and

that can sometimes just be informally talking about a situation. Like he [Principal

Joule] said, that has developed over time. (T4, 38-41)

Interestingly, while no protocol questions specifically asked about summer

retreats, participants in five of the six interviews mentioned their annual administrative

retreat as an opportunity for informal meetings. Often in a casual setting after the formal

work is completed for the day, the superintendents and principals were able to interact in

such a way to get to know each other better. Principal Ramsey describes it this way:

So, I think that a fascinating thing about our organization when we have our

leadership retreat is after the first day of the retreat we all get around the campfire

and it's our probably least professional moment where we drink too much, we

laugh, we tell jokes . . . what a cathartic thing and necessary thing it is for us.

Unfortunately, our former superintendent would always excuse herself and not be

a part of that because it was personally uncomfortable for her, but I do not think

she realized how essential it was for us as a team. I think that a lot of the bond that

exists comes from the times that we get to play together or recreate together as

much as it does for the collegiality. (T6, 406-415)

Informal meetings also allow for principals and superintendents to discuss their

lives outside of school. Interview data showed the importance of discussing each other's

families and common interests outside of work. Superintendent Darwin explained the

importance of getting to know her principals, stating, "I always focus on building

relationships and how important that is and learning about the person and their family."

In a similar manner, Superintendent Jemison stated, "the formation on a partnership is

dependent on time together and everybody's willingness to sort of just be human."

Overall, this subsection presented the evidence used to determine the importance,

and variations that exist, of communication within each of the principal-superintendent

partnerships. The next theme will present evidence on the existence of shared alignment

within these partnerships.

"Aligned at the core." Overall, the participating pairs discussed their similar core

values across various aspects of working in K-12 education. Whether the interview

conversation was discussing instruction, student discipline, interactions with families,

interactions with staff or long-term planning, alignment was evident between the

principals and superintendents. West and Derrington (2009) argued that alignment

between principals and superintendents was a foundation of leadership teaming. The interview data indicated that having alignment allows for collaborative conversations on complex issues. This concept is shared by Principal Dalton:

> There may be a lack of disagreements because of how often we talk. I hear that something's coming and I don't understand it I come over and we have a conversation about it. I think philosophically, about innovation and student discipline and supervision of staff, we're pretty aligned, so it makes it pretty easy to do that. (T5, 301-305)

Superintendent Jemison shared a similar perspective when she was sharing how a trusted partnership, with aligned core values, can impact the decision-making process. She stated, "At times, we might disagree initially, but I think the work ethic and our similar philosophies and the willingness to listen and the willingness to spend the time and not rush to a decision allows us to find that equal ground." As Principal Ramsey reflected on his alignment with Superintendent Rutherford, he gave examples of specific core values shared between them:

> You have to have enough shared common values. If you don't have that, I'm not sure you can get to a place of trust that we have. I think we both think that we should treat people decently. I think honesty matters. I think integrity matters. There's a lot of shared values we have together. I think there's a real authenticity to both of us and I think we appreciate each other for you know what we do bring to the table. (T6, 614-620)

Superintendent Rutherford agreed, stating, "I think he [Principal Ramsey] and I both root for kids and I think that's the final commonality that's the most important one in the

principal/superintendent relationship." Principal Joule made a similar reflection when discussing his partnership with Superintendent Jemison:

So I think naturally, one of our connections is we have a lot of the same interests. We go about things in a similar kind of way. Our skill sets and strengths overlap in a lot of areas. I think naturally you gravitate towards leaders who are similar to you. (T4, 57-60)

Comparing two statements made by Superintendent Goodall at different stages of the interview highlight some similarities between him and Principal Gibbs. In discussing the needs of the district during the hiring process of Principal Gibbs, he stated, "I felt that what we really needed here in the district is people who have a growth mindset and high emotional intelligence". Later in the interview, when reflecting on why he was hired as a building principal earlier in his career, he stated, "My mentor did not see necessarily strong content knowledge about literacy but saw leadership skills and saw an emotional intelligence, saw a growth mindset."

Overall, this subsection presented the evidence used to determine that similar core values were present within principal-superintendent partnerships. The next theme will present evidence on how principal autonomy exists within these partnerships.

"I am not on an island." Often, principals and superintendents can feel they are on an island, especially when needing to make decisions (West & Derrington, 2009). In all six interviews, the principal-superintendent pairs provided perspective data on how their partnership limited that feeling of isolation. While research indicated the importance of principals having autonomy within their building to make decisions, the partnerships in this study created *collaborative autonomy* for principals. By having someone to bounce ideas off, principals did not feel isolated and the trust from superintendents only strengthened that partnership. Principal Dalton stated, "She [Superintendent Darwin]

provides me feedback but in general, I feel like I've had kind of free reign." In describing the trust Superintendent Goodall has for Principal Gibbs, he stated:

> Principal Gibbs has a pulse of the school at all times so he usually knows how it [a decision] will play out better than I will because he is in the trenches with those people and engaged with them more often. Why would I hire smart people and then tell them what to do? As a principal, I was proud of myself on having some autonomy on the job that I was doing. (T3, 189-193)

Superintendent Goodall shared why he gives so much decision-making power to his principals:

> I realized there were certain expectations from central office but I really appreciated it when my superintendent said, you know what, you're the boots on the ground. You know the culture, you know the superstars…I always thrived in that environment so anytime I had the opportunity to lead people I wanted to be that person of support. (T3, 109-116)

> Even though there is autonomy granted to Principal Edison, when it comes to deciding on a situation that was new to him, he shared the value of being able to collaborate with Superintendent Elion before making a decision:

> When there is something new, because there always is, I reach out and I'm pretty up front and honest I say this is a new one that I have not had an opportunity to experience yet. She helps me process to understand what am I thinking about, what am I not thinking about. This is a growth opportunity for me. (T2, 105-109)

In line with Principal Edison's reflection, having the level of trust to be able to ask for advice on a new situation for a principal was also shared by Principal Libby:

I feel comfortable asking him [Superintendent Lamarck] about how he would

handle certain new situations for me. Not, how would you want me to handle it,

but how would you handle this as someone who has sat in my seat. Basically, I

am looking to see what he thinks the best way is to go about a situation, but he

knows I am not looking for him to micromanage me on it. (T1, 190-195)

All groups discussed the fact that the partnership helped limit the feeling of

isolation that comes from being in leadership roles. However, more of the benefits shared

were linked to the principalship. Except for final decisions around staffing, no other

decisions to be made by superintendents were discussed throughout the interviews.

As shown from the four themes presented in this section, the evolution of the

principal-superintendent partnership that occurs between some principals and

superintendents is a gradual process, not well defined as having a development phase,

maintenance phase and repair phase. The next section will present the two themes that

emerged as a result of analyzing the data collect to answer research question 2.

Research Question 2: How Do Principal-superintendent Partnerships Contribute to

Organizational Effectiveness?

The protocol questions were aligned to gather data on research question 2: How

do partnerships between principals and superintendents in suburban districts contribute to

organizational effectiveness and accountability? In the analysis of the participant

responses, two overarching themes emerged, as shown in Table 4.3. The first theme was

"sailing the ships in the same direction," reflecting the concept that the two ships, being

the school and district, need to be heading in the same direction in terms of alignment to

the mission and vision. The second theme was "there is always room to grow as a

leader," which highlights the mutual growth facilitated by the partnership. Table 4.3

presents the two themes, subthemes, and key concepts for research question 2.

Table 4.3

Research Question 2 – Themes and Key Concepts

Theme	Key Concept	Subtheme
"Sailing the ships in the same direction."	District alignment across leadership levels	"Development of the path." "Executing the plan."
"There is always room to grow as a leader."	Leadership growth is enhanced by the partnership.	

"Sailing the ships in the same direction." The interview data in this study

reinforced the power of alignment between the school and district level to positively

impact the organization. Consistently, both principals and superintendents referenced

how their partnerships supported the ability to align effectively. Superintendent Elion

stated:

> I think the fact that we are really on the same page, are talking about the work,
>
> understand the work, and all having the same discussion. In thinking about what
>
> needs to happen at the secondary school, I think the relationship helps move
>
> things forward. Being on the same page and thinking about what the needs are at
>
> the school. (T2, 419-422)

In response to his superintendent's comment, Principal Edison agreed, stating, "if we're

not on the same page, aligned, doing the same work and working together, these things

don't come together." Superintendent Jemison explained why alignment at the high school level is critical to her larger district, stating, "From the high school perspective, your high schools are sort of your flagships so alignment can make a big difference in terms of what the community sees." While the conversation with the pair from Elizabeth School District was referencing a secondary school, a similar statement was shared by Superintendent Goodall when describing Principal Gibbs's leadership in his elementary school. He stated:

> I think the partnership has definitely benefited the district...the elementary school was in dire need of leadership change and I give credit to Principal Gibbs and his leadership and to his staff for buying into his leadership for the turnaround they have had...I think our partnership, in a way that we operate, really has allowed us to make several years gains toward our district vision in the short time that we've worked together. (T3, 476-481)

To share how the principal-superintendent partnership has benefited A. Johnson School District, Superintendent Jemison connected partnership to the broader vision of where the district is moving. She stated:

> When I started as superintendent, I talked a lot about how I felt our reputation was really bruised. Having been in the system with previous leadership, I was experiencing the toxic culture firsthand. It was very real and it led to big impacts within the system with teachers and students and staff but also from a community perspective in terms of trust and how people viewed us. I personally feel a culture shift would start from having healthy relationships internally and by promoting each other internally. So I think what's happened with positive relationships and

partnerships is there is not the finger-pointing. Principal Joule would never bash

the district about a decision that we've made because he's been part of it and

because we've got a good relationship and we're more jointly owning things. So

with that comes not only do we have a good relationship but we're moving in the

same direction and we have a strategic plan that we've worked on together and

articulate together. That has shown unity at the top leadership positions. That's

had a really positive impact in terms of what teachers see, how they feel, how

they feel supported and then also what our community is seeing and feeling in

terms of changing that mindset around trust. If they hear Principal Joule say

something that I've said it's just reinforcing that alignment piece. It becomes clear

to them that we are aligned and we care about each other. It becomes clear that we

generally like each other and that we trust each other. (T4, 319-344)

While the previous data address the impact of the partnership on the organization, the

quote by Superintendent Jemison also introduces two subthemes. First, principal-

superintendent partnerships *develop the path* of the partnership together. Second, they

each have a role in *executing the plan* as it moves forward.

"Development of the path." As discussed in several interviews, the formal

development of the district's mission and vision occurs in a larger group setting, often

during the summer retreat. Principal-superintendent partnerships play a role in this

process by helping superintendents plan these larger meetings. Stated specifically,

Superintendent Rutherford shared that "Principal Ramsey is a master of making

connections. Oftentimes, I will work with him on an idea and he will help me connect it

in meaningful ways for the administrative team." When describing early-stage

discussions in Elizabeth School District, Principal Edison shared, "We've had several

major initiatives and/or events that we've had to work through together. Any one of them

could have taken the ship off the rails." One such initiative was discussed by

Superintendent Elion:

> The critical work that we did thorough a recalibration of our code of conduct,
>
> renaming it our code of character conduct and support. We saw that as an integral
>
> piece in the work around our focus district and the way that we were responding
>
> when there were student disciplinary issues. We realized that we needed to shift
>
> into a more restorative and accountable approach. It is critical that we're
>
> developing this together because those are the kind of things where if you're not
>
> on the same page and you're trying to do significant work, all it takes from a
>
> principal is a negative comment or look and people get the sense that the team is
>
> not on the same page. (T2, 442-449)

Equally important as establishing a plan for the district, principal-superintendent

partnerships allow for an effective implementation of the vision within the district.

"Executing the plan." While the vision may come, in large part, from the

superintendent through collaboration with district leadership, the execution of the plan

often rests on the shoulders of the principals. Superintendent Rutherford stated,

"Principals are the important enzyme. They have to transmit the information from the

brain to the heart back from the heart to the brain". Stated more concretely, Principal

Libby described his role this way:

> I'm the first point of disseminating information, like district level goals and things
>
> we discuss that a summer retreat. My job is to make sure those things we're

implementing are done well in the building. Superintendent Lamarck's overseeing the whole thing and expecting his principals to be doing these things in the building to make sure we're aligning ourselves with the vision. We are trusting in the vision and following through on some of those things and making sure we're doing things that align with each other as buildings and certainly with the district level organizational chart. (T1, 272-278)

As a continuation of this conversation, Superintendent Lamarck expanded on Principal Libby's statement:

I allow him [Principal Libby] the opportunity to have a voice and mark his leadership because he's the one to deliver the message. In knowing the type of person he is, you have to let him experience and express the art and science of leadership the way he does it. He does it very well, right, and knowing that I can't do it in eight different buildings is key. He is able to orchestrate it and leading how it plays out. (T1, 284-288)

As a veteran superintendent, Mrs. Darwin knows how critically important a principal is for the execution of her vision. While we were discussing this topic, she bluntly stated, "We are aligned in our vision for teaching and learning and that is exactly why I hired him." Principal Dalton adds, "In terms of the effectiveness of the organization, our school looks better, it feels better, kids are learning at a higher level. The goals of 5 years ago are starting to come to fruition so instructional technology is alive and well." Superintendent Goodall shared the same perspective when connecting the selection of Principal Gibbs to his vision of where Grace School District was heading.

By knowing he was selected as part of Superintendent Goodall's vision, Principal Gibbs feels able to contribute to the execution moving forward. He stated:

> Him [Superintendent Goodall] hiring me and sharing his overall plan, with me as part of it, has impacted me because it's given me the courage to be a risk-taker and speak out during our cabinet meetings with people that have been doing the job a lot longer than me. He [Superintendent Goodall] has faith in me and trusts me and he hired me for specific reasons, and I feel like I know those reasons. (T3, 149-154)

Overall, this subsection presented the evidence used to determine how the partnership between principals and superintendents improves the development and execution of the district's mission and vision. The next theme reveals how the principal-superintendent partnership has made the interview participants more effective leaders of their schools and districts.

"There is always room to grow as a leader." Strong leadership teams consist of members who openly share knowledge, experience, and wisdom (West & Derrington, 2009). While each of the six dyadic interviews were made up of participants with varying levels of experience in their own roles and their time together, each pair discussed how they are better leaders because of the partnership. While Superintendent Elion shared, "I see my role as making sure I am doing everything to help Principal Edison develop and grow," she also stated:

> I trust Principal Dalton's assessment of things. I have probably even honed my thinking about student life issues because of the way he is able to succinctly recall all the details. He is able to walk through everything and able to tell me exactly

what happened. For me, I find that incredibly helpful and I trust the things that he says. (T2, 511-515)

As Superintendent Darwin was discussing her process of learning and growing as a leader, she shared, "I try to be reflective about whatever the issue is and have conversations with people and I think that's helped us move things forward when there have been some challenging situations." Principal Dalton followed up this comment by reinforcing the culture Superintendent Darwin has established:

If you're unsure, ask. Don't take the autonomy for granted but check in along the way. I think meeting with [Superintendent Darwin] monthly is a natural way to be able to do that. She will never really tell you exactly what to do but she'll say you might want to think about this or that and that's when you know what she's telling you to focus in on. (T5, 435-439)

As an example of true life-long learning, Principal Ramsey candidly shared that he recommended Superintendent Rutherford to the Board because, "he was the one candidate who I believed would help me continue to grow in my role." As a specific example, Principal Ramsey shared:

Superintendent Rutherford has helped me become more data-driven. I am still not all the way there but have moved more in that direction and took time, it took me a long time, to understand how it connects to the master plan that he has. Now that plan has become clear for me. (T6, 567-569)

As the only principal-superintendent pair who worked together in different roles during a 14-year period, Principal Joule and Superintendent Jemison shared perceptions

around leadership growth anchored in honest feedback and genuine curiosity about decisions made. Principal Joule shared:

> I've always felt that I can bring feedback to her [Superintendent Jemison], positive or negative. But it's real, it's authentic and there's no sugarcoating…she only wants the honest and true feedback regarding what's working and what's not. (T4, 348-359)

Superintendent Jemison expanded on Principal Joule's comments, explaining why honest feedback is important:

> Principal Joule has political savviness as a skill set but more importantly, our relationship exists where they can come and say "this is gonna go bad" and I have to trust him and then figure out what we're gonna do to avoid some of the things that could happen. (T4, 393-397)

As a continuation to the notion of learning through their conversations, Principal Joule added:

> When a decision is made, there are times when we might say to each other "help me understand this, give me a perspective." I think that allows us to grow. It's not critical, it's helped me because I didn't fully understand the situation that led to that decision and it does allow me to grow as an educator. (T4, 102-106)

Describing their learning as less transactional and more transformational, Superintendent Goodall, from Grace School District, discussed the learning that occurs from conversations:

> There are times that I learn things from Principal Gibbs. He'll send me an article he read or I'll send one I read. We look at every situation as a learning

opportunity. Often around systems thinking, we will discuss what the principal

and superintendent can be doing or what's best for students and how can we make

this better. It's never personal so I think that that's been a big part of our growth

as well, having the same common goal. (T3, 129-134)

When discussing leadership development at Lynn School District, Superintendent

Lamarck explains his view on the continuous growth of his leaders, as well as the

challenges that come with pushing leaders. He stated:

You have to develop leaders. You have to nurture and create the right

environment to foster leadership capacity. It's as simple as that…It's not easy

because you're dealing with human nature and the factors and variables in

people's lives and outside worlds. Also, their insecurities so you need to develop

some systemic response about capacity. (T1, 303-313)

Principal Libby explained how his leadership has been nurtured by

Superintendent Lamarck, who is also a former principal:

He is good at seeing where it's gonna go and that's something I'm still learning.

That is the growth piece about being a principal. He's got a higher level of where

things can go and where they can turn. I'll fight for anything he wants me to fight

for and I think he can tell me to slow down a little bit when I need to get big-

picture focused again. (T1, 314-324)

As the two themes for research question 2 reveal, the perspective data gathered

from this study showed that established partnerships between some principals and

superintendents contribute to organizational effectiveness at the district and school level.

From the discussion, as two members of a *team,* principals and superintendents felt

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accountable to not let each other down. In addition, their responses to the protocol questions revealed how their partnership contributed more to increased alignment of mission and vision, as well as increased leadership capacity.

Summary of Results

This chapter presented the results of six dyadic interviews, each interview with a principal-superintendent pair from a suburban school district. For research question 1, the data examined how partnerships formed, were maintained, and were repaired between these principals and superintendents. Four themes emerged from the study results. First, trust was a critical component found in all six partnerships. Second, various modes of communication were frequent and open. Third, data revealed shared values within the partnerships. Fourth, while autonomy existed for the principals, collaboration was welcomed and valued by both principals and superintendents.

While presented as four themes, *trust* was the connecting theme throughout the entire interview process. Both "communication makes a team strong" and "I am not on an island" would not likely have emerged without the presence of trust. As seen by having three subthemes, the creation of trust is complicated. It is the combination of assumed trust and earned trust through hiring, knowledge, interactions, and decision-making.

For research question 2, in analyzing how the presence of a partnership between school and district leaders contributes to organizational effectiveness and accountability within the district, two themes emerged. First, alignment between the principal and superintendent allows for a more efficient execution of the district's mission and vision at the school level. Each level has a role in the process, and each is held accountable for moving their ship in the same direction; the principal leads the school while the

superintendent leads the district. Second, leadership growth for both principals and superintendents is enhanced by the partnership. While not directly felt by the students day-to-day, these two themes, in conjunction with each other, result in more effective organizational systems due to stronger leaders moving towards the full implementation of the district's vision and mission.

Chapter 5 discusses the research implications based on the results presented in Chapter 4. Also, Chapter 5 includes the limitations of the research. Additionally, recommendations for research, higher education institutions, and hiring committees are included in the chapter. Lastly, the conclusion of the study is presented.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

  While researchers have studied the principalship and superintendency from various lenses, existing research has yet to provide knowledge regarding the working relationship between principals and superintendents at the level of a partnership. The purpose of this study was to examine partnerships between principals and their superintendents in suburban school districts. This chapter provides an overview of the research findings, along with the implications of these findings. In addition, limitations to this study are provided, as well as recommendations for future research, and practice. The West and Derrington framework (2009) guided the following research questions for this study:

  1. How do principals and superintendents in suburban districts develop, maintain and repair aspects of a partnership, or non-hierarchical working relationship?

  2. How does a partnership between principals and superintendents in suburban districts contribute to organizational effectiveness and accountability?

From the analysis of the interview data, several themes emerged from this study resulting in three key findings.

Implications of Findings

The value of study findings will be discussed with attention to how they aligned with existing literature and West and Derrington's (2009) leadership framework. From their analysis of the working relationship between principals and superintendents, West and Derrington (2009) developed four components in their framework; (a) Leadership Teaming, (b) Leadership Qualities, (c) Leadership Team Essentials, and (d) Leadership Learning. Principals and superintendents cannot work independently of each other. More importantly, greater successes at both the district and school levels occur using a team approach (West & Derrington, 2009). The study produced three key findings. First, aspects of a partnership can develop between a principal and superintendent within a hierarchy. Second, the process of establishing partnerships can be considered a leadership strategy. Third, the partnership between a principal and superintendent empowers the principal to stretch his or her leadership potential.

Finding 1: Aspects of a partnership can develop between a principal and superintendent within a hierarchy. While superintendents are clearly at the top of the chain of command in all aspects of school districts, the interview dyads in this study revealed that their established partnerships with principals flexed some aspects of this hierarchical role. As participants described the various ways they interacted as school and district leaders, it became evident that each of the six dyads were functioning at the level of a partnership, as defined in this study. Using the literature, *partnerships* were defined as interactions between individuals within organizations working beyond the traditional organizational levels (Kolk et al., 2016). As an extension, these partnerships have been described as *cross-boundary* partnerships because they cross established boundaries of job responsibility, title, influence, and decision-making power (Lawson et al., 2017).

Important to note, the established partnerships developed between principals and superintendents in this study represented various-sized school districts. The suburban districts ranged in size from having 17 schools to two schools.

Participants shared that their partnerships flex the communication boundaries that exist within the hierarchical levels of an organization. Instead of communication only occurring during formal meetings when superintendents and principals are scheduled to be together, communication within the principal-superintendent partnerships occurred frequently and openly during impromptu hallway conversations, during bus duty, and via text messages outside of school hours. These interactions created opportunities for idea sharing in real time as situations were unfolding, or when initiatives were just starting to form. Collectively, the participants in this study provided numerous examples of how interactions occurred outside of the school level and district level leadership boundaries.

Interview participants shared that their partnerships flexed the decision-making boundary that exists at the school level. Due to their partnership, the principals in this study did not feel micromanaged by their superintendents when both were discussing challenging student management situations. Traditionally, student management decisions are made by the principal. Due to flexible hierarchical boundaries, ideas shared by either member of the partnership had equal weight with the goal being the best outcome possible. Being able to have genuine discussions on school-level decisions, across boundaries, gave principal participants insight without sacrificing their decision-making power to the superintendent. As numerous research studies found, having autonomy when it comes to building-level decisions is essential to a principal's ability to lead their school , grow as a leader, and contribute to the success of the district (Chang et al., 2015;

Engel & Curran, 2015; Forner et al., 2012; Honig, 2012; Weiner & Woulfin, 2016; West et al., 2014). As this study revealed, partnerships between the principals and superintendents allowed for collaborative autonomy, not superintendent micromanagement.

As found in research on the private sector by Kolk et al. (2016), partnerships flexed boundaries as both a trickle-up and trickle-down concept. In the current study, principal-superintendent partnerships flexed the hierarchical boundary that exists around staffing decisions linked to the budget-development role of superintendents. While staffing decisions ultimately remained with the superintendent, principals were able to provide insight on important staffing decisions. Principals understood the daily impact at the school level, which was a perspective not often available to the superintendent. As acknowledged by the superintendents in this study, potential ripple effects of staffing decisions were better predicted by the principal. By way of an established partnership, superintendents in this study created the opportunity for principal influence in superintendent decision-making. The importance of upper-level decision makers collaborating with their direct reports was a key finding of Eisler and Potter (2014). Their study introduced the concept of interprofessional partnerships between nurses and physicians in the health care field. Much like the observations that principals know more about the impact of central decisions in their schools, nurses were able to contribute to the discussion before doctors made final decisions (Eisler & Potter, 2014).

Two dyads in the study discussed how their principal-superintendent partnership helped flex a traditional hierarchical boundary. Two of the participating principals also served as union president for the districts' administrative units. While the potential was

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there for an *us versus them* mentality, both dyads shared that their partnership enabled

them to work collaboratively, across the union boundary, in much the same way they did

as principal and superintendent. Collectively, participants described their partnerships as

a series of interactions and experiences which flexed the employee-employer boundary,

causing greater opportunities for collaboration.

Prior to the study, there was no specific research on partnerships between

principals and superintendents. However, existing research on ways to flex hierarchical

boundaries in other fields supports the finding that principal-superintendent partnerships

can exist. West and Derrington (2009) explained in their *leadership teaming* component

that administrative success is a team endeavor, not an individual pursuit. Both members

of the principal-superintendent team must fully believe they are stronger together. As

explained in their *leadership qualities* component, West and Derrington (2009)

highlighted that having well-developed interpersonal skills is critical for team success,

allowing for open and frequent communication. Integral to this open and frequent

communication, West and Derrington (2009) emphasized the importance of

communicating what aspects of an organization are going well and what areas need

improvement. Through continuous communication, there can be more exchanges of

information and opportunities for relationships to grow (Crum et al., 2009; Thompson &

France, 2015). Conversely, West (2011) found that one of the barriers to a successful

partnership revolved around poor and infrequent communication skills.

Finding 2: Partnerships as a leadership strategy. The creation of partnerships

can be a leadership strategy, used by superintendents and principals, to increase

organizational effectiveness and accountability. This finding is an extension of

Northouse's (2016) summary of transformational leadership. According to Northouse, the purposeful development and sustainability of trusted relationships, as a leadership strategy, is a foundation of transformational leadership. Interestingly, none of the dyadic interview participants explicitly stated that their partnership developed due to a systemic approach. Equally as important, none of the interview participants stated that their partnership was just a lucky combination of two compatible people. Collectively, participants shared that their partnerships were anchored in trust, open and frequent communication, and collaborative decision-making.

The principals and superintendents in this study credit their partnerships for allowing them to be vulnerable in front of each other. Participants provided examples of times when they were comfortable sharing with their dyad partner their level of fear or uncertainty around school-related situations. In addition, participants were comfortable debriefing with their dyad partner after decisions had been made. Through this vulnerability, the principals and superintendents acknowledged the leadership growth they experienced. All 12 participants also discussed the existence and importance of trust within their partnership. While there was often a level of assumed trust at the beginning of their work relationship, time was needed for the trust to evolve into a level needed to establish their partnership. The partnership then resulted in more open and frequent communication.

As the two most influential individuals within the district, principals and superintendents provided numerous examples of how their partnership allowed for the challenging of ideas. Not everyone within a school district can challenge principals and superintendents on their thinking. Importantly, within these principal-superintendent

partnerships, honest communication was welcomed and valued. While disagreements may have put a stress on a typical working relationship, the partners in this study shared that disagreements are critical in the decision-making process. Participating superintendents shared that their principals provided a different perspective that resulted in a more comprehensive view of a potential decision's impact on the organization. As one example, Superintendent Lamarck recalled a time when Principal Libby respectfully disagreed with his initial recommendation to cut a service provider from his school. Trusting Mr. Libby, Superintendent Lamarck accepted his recommendation and added that Mr. Libby was right in his challenge of the initial recommendation.

Often, broader educational conversations revolve around a district's mission, core values, and long-term vision. Participants discussed how their partnership helped to form an aligned vision that was well executed from central office to the school level. The superintendents and principals, working in partnership, experienced greater alignment and more efficient implementation. When attempting to make systematic change to an organization, being strategic about developing principal-superintendent partnerships increases the success rate of implementation. In addition, the collaboration process caused participants to feel more accountable to each other and the overall mission by making sure they performed their role on the team.

Given these findings, it may be surprising to report that participants had never thought of their work relationship as a partnership until they participated in this study. Given the absence of empirical research on the concept of partnerships in K-12 education, this lack of awareness is not surprising. However, West and Derrington's (2009) research supports the value added to districts when the principal and

superintendent work together at a partnership level. West and Derrington (2009) explained in their *leadership team essentials* component, when trust exists between a principal and superintendent, thoughts and opinions can be shared and challenged openly and honestly without fear. Additionally, Lawson et al. (2017) found that trust across staff boundaries within a school district showed an increase in student achievement. In terms of vision alignment, Honig (2012) found that student learning benefits from the creation of a team approach between individual schools and the district office on instruction, curricular alignment, and data.

   Finding 3: Partnerships between principals and superintendents empower principals to stretch their leadership potential. While principal-superintendent partnerships were beneficial to both members of the dyad, the study revealed greater impact on the principalship by shifting their influence from building management to building leadership. Principals in a partnership with their superintendents can contribute to decisions that go beyond typical school-level decisions. Within principal-superintendent partnerships, principals showed that they were able to take risks and be innovative. Enabled by the trust that existed within each of these principal-superintendent partnerships, the participating principals were able to explore paths to make substantive change. Principals were energized and encouraged to think outside the box, using a transformational mindset, when faced with challenging situations. While not using the term partnership, Raj and Srivastava (2016) found that a transformational leadership style facilitated innovation at both the individual level and organizational level. Innovation exists as invisible assets embodied in the employees of a company (Raj & Srivastava,

2016). The established partnership between participating dyads created the space for principals to influence the school and district at a transformational level.

The principalship is like no other position in K-12 education. Daily, a principal is pulled in many different directions, expected to make decisions of varying importance while navigating an ever-changing political landscape. From the interview data, five principals made a point of stating that their superintendent had principal experience. These five superintendents shared their understanding of what their principals were managing daily. More importantly, they discussed the importance of supporting their principals as the principals stretched their vision for change.

The idea that principal-superintendent partnerships enable principals to stretch their potential for innovation is not currently present in the literature. While there is considerable research on the importance of superintendents creating principal autonomy, none examined innovation. Chang et al. (2015) explored how the level of perceived autonomy granted to them by their superintendent affected the commitment to their school and their job satisfaction. Weiner and Woulfin (2016) focused on controlled autonomy for principals when making instructional decisions. In both studies, the principals' decisions studied were managerial in nature (Chang et al., 2015; Weiner & Woulfin, 2016). In contrast, the principal participants in this study discussed their ability to make innovative decisions that facilitated substantial shifts in school culture. As West and Derrington (2009) explained in their *leadership learning* component, principals learn more when given the opportunity to control their own learning under the mentorship of their superintendent. As an extension, critical to leadership learning is the establishment of a risk-free environment to test new ideas with opportunities for reflection and feedback

(West & Derrington, 2009). This increased level of learning becomes optimal when superintendents are open to acting as a co-learner in the innovative process.

This study showed an advantage for school districts to flex the well-established hierarchical boundaries between principals and superintendents through partnerships. The study revealed a greater understanding of how principal-superintendent partnerships are formed, maintained, and repaired. In addition, the study provided a broader perspective on how principal-superintendent partnerships impact a school district.

Limitations of the Study

The scope of the dissertation study was limited to six principals and six superintendents working in suburban schools in one New York State county. Due to the nature of qualitative research methods, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to represent all principal-superintendent partnerships that exist in K-12 education. Suburban districts were selected for this study due to demographic changes occurring within suburban schools that reflect increased socioeconomic and racial diversity. As such, principals and superintendents are experiencing greater accountability and more complexity in their decision-making roles making the discussion of cross boundary relationships timely. However, urban and rural districts were not part of this study.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study analyzed the phenomenon that is a formed partnership across well-established hierarchical boundaries, using qualitative methods. Keeping the concept of partnerships across hierarchical boundaries constant, future research studies could contribute additional findings to the field of K-12 education.

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First, it is recommended that this same research study be conducted using self-identified principal-superintendent partnerships in both rural and urban settings across NYS. The research findings and key implications of such a study would allow for an additional level of analysis by comparing them to the results of this dissertation study of only suburban districts.

Second, using quantitative methodology, administering a survey to principals and superintendents would create the opportunity to gather perception data on partnerships across many districts around the country. This quantitative approach would allow for statistical analysis of principal perceptions, compared to superintendent perceptions on the principal-superintendent partnership. In addition, this large-scale approach would allow for generalizations to be made.

Third, it is recommended that a study be conducted to focus on the comparison of partnership formation between principal-superintendent pairs where the superintendent does, or does not, have principalship experience. From the results of a 2015 survey offered to all United States superintendents, over 80% of superintendents have had principal experience, meaning 20% have not (Robinson, Shakeshaft, Grogan, & Newcomb, 2017). As this study revealed, past principal experience of the superintendent was mentioned in five interviews where the superintendent had served as principal. In the sixth interview, the superintendent's lack of principal experience was not mentioned. Important to note, there were no interview questions designed to gather specific data on how the superintendent's work experience impacted the partnership. This further exploration would help reveal additional perspective data, specific to the formation of principal-superintendent partnerships with or without the shared principalship experience.

Recommendations for Practice

As this study has shown, the concept of partnership formation between principals and superintendents is a dynamic process, not simply a linear path with distinct stages. Figure 5.1 depicts a model of the dynamic process of partnership formation between principals and their superintendents. As demonstrated by the image being built on the left side, the gradual increase of the line's thickness represents the gradual increase in the strength of the partnership, driven by an increase in trust. The line's thickness grows along the path of the line, encountering events along the way that require trust and communication to navigate. These events vary in size, or severity, representing various types of disagreements, conflicts, or challenges. As the image shows, the loop that follows each event represents the repair that occurs to the partnership, resulting in slightly thicker lines each time. On the right side of the figure, West and Derrington's (2009) four leadership components of the principal-superintendent working relationship are holding up the partnership that has evolved. As this model shows, the dynamic nature of partnership formation is not simply a straight path but a process that includes partnership formation, maintenance, and repair. To help solidify the complex process of partnership formation, specific recommendations may increase the quantity of principal-superintendent pairs at the top of this dynamic linear model.
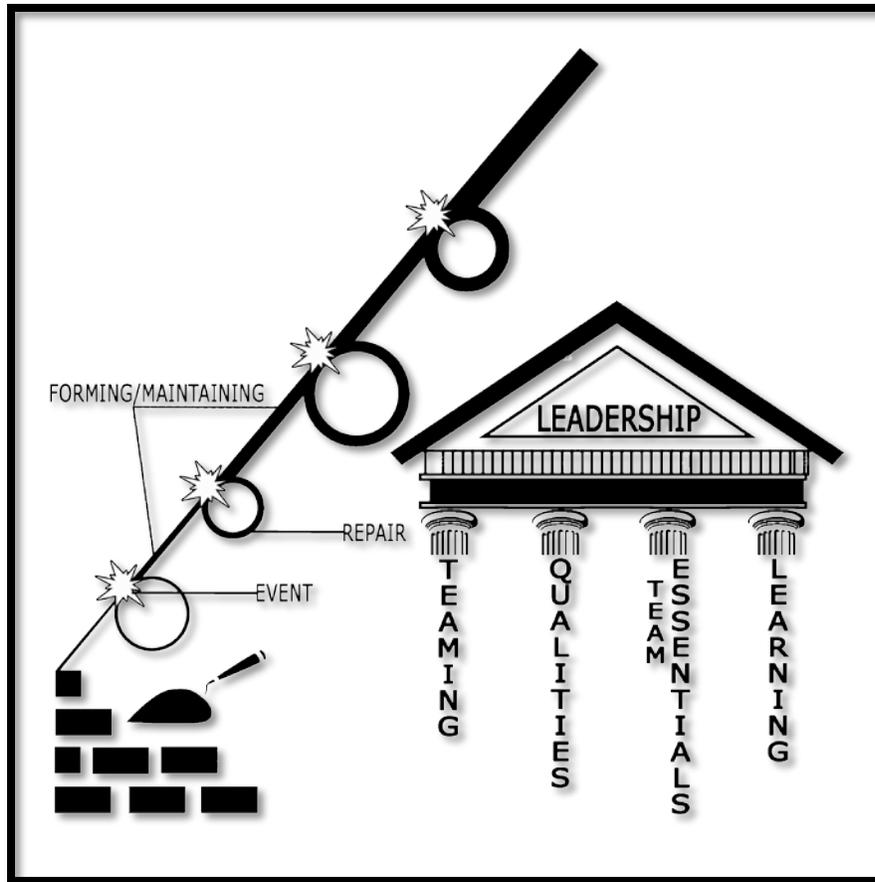
Figure 5.1. The dynamic formation of principal-superintendent partnerships.

This study leads to several recommendations for practice. As this study was conducted in suburban school districts, they may be particularly helpful for districts under 4,000 students. The first section discusses recommendations for practicing superintendents. The second section contains recommendations for practicing principals. The third section contains recommendations for professional organizations that serve educational leaders at both the school and district level. The last section discusses recommendations for higher education institutions.

Superintendents. The findings of this study highlight the advantages to a school district when their district leader and school leader function as partners in aspects of their relationship. First, superintendents should create time to interact with their principals in

informal settings. This is even more critical with new principals due to their steep learning curve. Whether it is during casual walks down the hallway or during bus duty, these conversations lay the foundation for trust and interpersonal norms that start to flex the hierarchical boundaries that exist (Lawson, et al., 2017; West, 2011; West & Derrington, 2009). Second, while superintendents should grant all principals autonomy to allow opportunities for growth and development as leaders within their district (Chang et al., 2015; Weiner & Woulfin, 2016), the findings of this dissertation reveal how the principal-superintendent partnership amplifies the principal's influence when given autonomy. Principals operating within a partnership feel empowered to become innovators due to their increased level of trust and reduced fear of failure (West, 2011). Interestingly, principals in partnerships with collaborative autonomy will likely reach out to their superintendents to discuss their ideas. These discussions are not for gaining approval, but for improving quality through trusted collaboration. Third, superintendents should be as transparent as possible with their principals to build trust and foster shared decision-making. When superintendents are faced with a challenging situation, reaching out to their principals to gather their perspectives causes principals to feel worthwhile, valuable, and useful in the decision-making process (Rana, 2015). Important to this recommendation, the superintendent should create the norm that disagreements are welcomed and valued. Only when ideas are challenged can more effective solutions emerge. Given a superintendent's role as leader of the district, without explicitly stating that disagreements or differing ideas are welcome, he or she may not be given truthful feedback.

Principals. In much the same way that superintendents need to be willing to reduce or flex established hierarchical boundaries, there are recommendations for principals who help to create partnerships with their superintendent. First, principals should welcome and pursue opportunities to communicate in informal settings with their superintendent (West & Derrington, 2009). It is through these interactions that trust is established and strengthened. Second, when given the opportunity to make innovative decisions, principals should be confident enough to collaborate with their superintendent. In the presence of a partnership, collaboration is not a sign of incompetence, but a sign of trust in the work relationship (Raj & Srivastava, 2016). Third, principals need to understand that many final decisions remain with the superintendent. While partnerships do flex aspects of the principal-superintendent boundary, a hierarchy is still present, and the superintendent is ultimately responsible.

Professional organizations. As the findings of this study show, partnerships between principals and superintendents are advantageous for school districts. For that reason, professional organizations for K-12 educational leaders should provide resources on this topic to their members. As a recommendation to the School Superintendents Association (AASA), the value of creating partnerships with principals might be established through articles and editorials on their website or in their publications. AASA might also create an assessment that helps superintendents determine where they are in building partnerships with their principals. Assessment data could include the level of trust, approachability, ease of communication, frequency of collaboration, and decision-making processes. In addition, focused professional development on aspects of creating a partnership could be developed and made available.

As a recommendation for two organizations that support school principals, National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) and National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), the value of creating partnerships with their superintendents could be shared in journal articles and through annual conferences. Workshops could be facilitated by established principal-superintendent partners who could share aspects of teaming and successes as a partnership.

As a recommendation for the National School Boards Association (NSBA), the organization that supports boards of education, local school boards should be made aware of how partnerships between principals and superintendents are established and how they contribute to the organizational effectiveness of a school district. While boards of education have many responsibilities, two of the most important are the hiring and evaluation of the superintendent. With an awareness of how principal-superintendent partnerships are formed and maintained, school boards can ask specific questions as part of the interview process and include partnerships as part of an annual review.

Higher education institutions. As described in the results of this study, the evolution of the principal-superintendent partnership is a dynamic process, not achieved by all leadership teams, that follows a non-linear path. Each of these findings uncovered aspects of leadership that need to be thoughtfully learned through leadership development programs. Since higher education institutions provide training for school and district leaders, there are recommendations regarding the creation of partnerships and leadership curriculum. These recommendations are aligned to the 2018 National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) standards (Appendix B). Since variations exist between the NELP standards for building and district leadership, the alignment will be presented

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separately. For principals, Standards 2 and 5 state that future principals need to learn strategies to communicate effectively, develop professional norms, and develop partnerships within the decision-making process. In alignment with Standards 6 and 7, future principals need to learn strategies and systems that create opportunities for frequent and open communication, particularly in informal settings. For superintendents, Standards 1 and 2 state that future superintendents need to develop a *shared* mission, vison, and set of core values. The development of these shared district initiatives must be done using established professional norms. In alignment with Standard 6, future superintendents need to have a strong understanding of district systems and the human relationships that develop within those systems.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore partnerships between the two most influential leaders in K-12 school districts; the principal and superintendent. There are several dynamic forces that influence the working relationship between these two positions. First, the roles and responsibilities of these positions have evolved over the years and often vary between districts. Second, the superintendent supervises and evaluates the principal. Third, shared accountability at the federal and state levels exists. Fourth, the organizational structure within the district impacts the ability to interact. West and Derrington (2009) suggested that no matter how dynamic, knowledgeable, or influential a principal or superintendent may be as an individual leader, neither can operate independently of each other. For this reason, more needs to be learned about how principal-superintendent partnerships are formed, maintained, and repaired within districts. To guide this study, West and Derrington's (2009) four components of the

working relationship between principals and superintendents were used to examine the pair at the level of a partnership. Findings of this study uncovered how traditionally established hierarchical boundaries between the organizational levels of principal and superintendent can be flexed. In addition, the findings provided information on how these established partnerships impact organizational effectiveness and leadership potential of both members of the dyad.

As the literature was examined, there was a significant gap in studies focusing on the reduction of hierarchical boundaries in K-12 education. While not numerous, studies in both the private sector and health care field examined the concept of partnerships across organizational boundaries (Eisler & Potter, 2014; Kolk et al., 2016). While no previous study cumulatively linked the factors that result in principal-superintendent partnerships, an examination of the K-12 research literature revealed individual studies that investigated the factors identified in this dissertation. First, the existence of trust is paramount to both forming the foundation between educational leaders and building up the sustained work relationship (Daly et al., 2015; Hvidston et al., 2015; Lawson et al., 2017; Walker et al., 2011; West & Derrington, 2009). Second, open and frequent communication between principals and superintendents is critical to enhancing their leadership potential as a team (Howard, 2014; Kellogg, 2017; Marsh et al., 2017; Printy & Williams, 2015; West & Derrington, 2009). Third, as leaders within the organization, principals need to be granted a certain level of autonomy within their sphere of influence (Chang et al., 2013; Forner et al., 2012; Myers & Joseph, 1995; Waters & Marzano, 2006). Examining the K-12 literature identified in Chapter 2, there is minimal research on leaders of suburban districts. The research gap of suburban schools and the accountability

measures of newly adopted ESSA legislation provided the need for a focus on partnerships between principals and superintendents. Principals and superintendents in suburban schools are experiencing increased complexity resulting from populations shifts in socioeconomic and racial diversity and demographic changes in their districts. Increased accountability has shifted the role of school principals from building manager to instructional leader (Printy & Williams, 2015). In turn, effective superintendents have expanded from visionaries to facilitators that support the work done in the various schools within their district (Johnstone et al. 2009).

The study used qualitative methodology. Specifically, semi-structured dyadic interviews were conducted with six principal-superintendent teams. Dyadic interviews were selected for this study to enhance the quality and depth of the data collected due to opportunities for participants to comment on each other's responses. In addition, the researcher used field notes to comment on interactions between participants. Participants were also asked to individually rate their level of comfort in the dyadic interviews.

In analyzing the dyadic interview transcripts, several themes developed for both research questions through the two-cycle coding process. In determining how partnerships form, maintain, and repair (research question 1), four themes emerged: (a) trust: you can't see it, you can't touch it, but you know it is there; (b) communication makes a team strong; (c) aligned at the core; and (d) I am not on an island. In determining how principal-superintendent partnerships contribute to organizational effectiveness (research question 2), two themes emerged: (a) sailing the ships in the same direction and (b) there is always room to grow as a leader.

In analyzing the themes that arose from the coding process, three key findings surfaced from this study. First, aspects of a partnership can develop between a principal and superintendent within a hierarchy. Second, the purposeful establishment of principal-superintendent partnerships is an effective leadership strategy. Third, principals in partnerships with their superintendents are empowered to be innovative.

Based on these findings, recommendations were made for future research. First, performing a quantitative study using a larger participant population could result in enough data to generalize findings about the principal-superintendent partnership. Second, a replication of this study across other hierarchical boundaries would advance K-12 educational research. As an example, partnerships between teachers and their principals could be examined. Lastly, because most paths to the superintendency travel through the principalship, an extension of the study would be to include only superintendents without principal experience to gather more in-depth data on principal partnerships with non-traditional superintendents. As an extension, the findings from this proposed study could then be compared with the findings of this dissertation study.

Superintendents, as the organizational leader, must take the specific steps needed to cultivate partnerships through establishing trust, creating space for communication, and a willingness to relinquish decision-making control while remaining approachable. Aligned with the recommendation for superintendents, principals must be open to their superintendent's desire to establish a partnership. Due to the power of established partnerships between educational leaders, it is recommended that professional organizations for superintendents, principals, and school boards provide resources and professional development linked to the cultivation and assessment of partnerships. Lastly,

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as the educators of the next generation of educational leaders, higher education institutions must incorporate essential learning objectives linked to the cultivation of cross-boundary partnerships into their coursework.

As the two positions tasked with leading the learning of over 50 million K-12 students each year, this study may serve as a model for increasing the influence of principals and superintendents. While purposely aware of the hierarchy that exists between principals and superintendents, their willingness to flex those boundaries allows for innovation at the school level. Principals can extend their influence past the typical managerial level by being able to make decisions that impact the climate and culture of their building. Superintendents can gain a better understanding of their district, leading to more holistic decision making. Collectively, the principal-superintendent partnership creates leaders versus managers. The flexing of hierarchical boundaries, driven by trust, create open and frequent communication channels. Through these channels, honest conversations lead to areas of focus and substantive change. West (2011) wrote, "principals and superintendents who forge a solid partnership will more effectively determine what to do and how to go about doing it" (p. 10). Strong executive leadership is exemplified by the implementation of purposeful strategies. Relationships are important, but those at the level of a partnership within a hierarchical system create organizations operating at the highest level of organizational effectiveness.

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Professional Standards for Educational Leaders 2015 (PSEL)

Standard 1. Mission, Vision, and Core Values
Effective educational leaders develop, advocate, and enact a shared mission, vision, and core values of high-quality education and academic success and well-being of each student.

Standard 2. Ethics and Professional Norms
Effective educational leaders act ethically and according to professional norms to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Standard 3. Equity and Cultural Responsiveness
Effective educational leaders strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Standard 4. Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
Effective educational leaders develop and support intellectually rigorous and coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Standard 5. Community of Care and Support for Students
Effective educational leaders cultivate an inclusive, caring, and supportive school community that promotes the academic success and well-being of each student.

Standard 6. Professional Capacity of School Personnel
Effective educational leaders develop the professional capacity and practice of school personnel to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Standard 7. Professional Community for Teachers and Staff
Effective educational leaders foster a professional community of teachers and other professional staff to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Standard 8. Meaningful engagement of Families and Community
Effective educational leaders engage families and the community in meaningful, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial ways to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Standard 9. Operations and Management
Effective educational leaders manage school operations and resources to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Standard 10. School Improvement
Effective educational leaders act as agents of continuous improvement to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

<center>**Appendix B**</center>

<center>**Draft – National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) Standards**</center>

For Building Level Leaders

Standard 1: Mission, Vision, and Core Values
Program completers who successfully complete a building level educational leadership preparation program understand and demonstrate the capability to promote the success and well-being of each student, teacher, and leader by applying the knowledge, skills, and commitments necessary for: 1) a shared mission and vision; 2) a set of core values; 3) a support system; and 4) a school improvement process.

Standard 2: Ethics and Professional Norms
Program completers who successfully complete a building level educational leadership preparation program understand and demonstrate the capability to promote the success and well-being of each student, teacher, and leader by applying the knowledge, skills, and commitments necessary for: 1) professional norms; 2) decision-making; 3) educational values; and 4) ethical behavior.

Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Leadership
Program completers who successfully complete a building level educational leadership preparation program understand and demonstrate the capability to promote the success and well-being of each student, teacher, and leader by applying the knowledge, skills, and commitments necessary for: 1) equitable protocols; 2) equitable access; 3) responsive practices; and 4) a supportive school community.

Standard 4: Instructional Leadership
Program completers who successfully complete a building level educational leadership preparation program understand and demonstrate the capability to promote the success and well-being of each student, teacher, and leader by applying the knowledge, skills, and commitments necessary for: 1) learning system; 2) instructional practice; 3) assessment system; and 4) learning supports.

Standard 5: Community and External Leadership
Program completers who successfully complete a building level educational leadership preparation program understand and demonstrate the capability to promote the success and well-being of each student, teacher, and leader by applying the knowledge, skills, and commitments necessary for: 1) effective communication; 2) engagement; 3) partnerships; and 4) advocacy.

Standard 6: Operations and Management
Program completers who successfully complete a building level educational leadership preparation program understand and demonstrate the capability to promote the success and well-being of each student, teacher, and leader by applying the knowledge, skills, and

commitments necessary for: 1) management and operation; 2) data and resources; 3) communication systems; and 4) legal compliance.

Standard 7: Human Resource Leadership

Program completers who successfully complete a building level educational leadership preparation program understand and demonstrate the capability to promote the success and well-being of each student, teacher, and leader by applying the knowledge, skills, and commitments necessary for: 1) human resources; 2) professional culture; 3) workplace conditions; and 4) supervision and evaluation.

Standard 8: Internship and Clinical Practice

Program completers who successfully complete a building level educational leadership preparation program engaged in a substantial and sustained educational leadership internship experience that developed their ability to promote the success and well-being of each student, teacher and leader through field experiences and clinical practice within a building setting, monitored and evaluated by a qualified, on-site mentor.

For District Level Leaders

Standard 1: Mission, Vision, and Core Values

Leadership candidates who successfully complete a district level educational leadership preparation program understand and demonstrate the capability to promote the success and well-being of each student, teacher, and leader by applying the knowledge, skills, and commitments necessary for: (1) a shared mission and vision; (2) a set of core values; (3) and continuous and sustainable district and school improvement.

Standard 2: Ethics and Professionalism

Leadership candidates who successfully complete a district level educational leadership preparation program understand and demonstrate the capability to promote the success and well-being of each student, teacher, and leader by applying the knowledge, skills, and commitments necessary for: (1) professional norms; (2) ethical behavior; (3) responsibility; and (4) ethical behavior.

Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Leadership

Leadership candidates who successfully complete a district level educational leadership preparation program promote the success and well-being of each student, teacher, and leader by applying the knowledge, skills, and commitments necessary for: (1) equitable treatment; (2) equitable access; (3) culturally and individually responsive practice; and (4) a healthy district culture.

Standard 4: Instructional Leadership

Leadership candidates who successfully complete a district level educational leadership preparation program understand and demonstrate the capability to promote the success and well-being of each student, teacher, and leader by applying the knowledge, skills, and

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commitments necessary through: (1) systems of learning and instruction; (2) instructional capacity; (3) professional development of principals; and (4) principal effectiveness.

Standard 5: Community and External Leadership
Leadership candidates who successfully complete a district level educational leadership preparation program understand and demonstrate the capability to promote the success and well-being of each student, teacher, and leader by applying the knowledge, skills, and commitments necessary for: (1) community engagement; (2) productive partnerships; (3) two-way communication; and (4) representation.

Standard 6: Management of People, Data, and Processes
Leadership candidates who successfully complete a district level educational leadership preparation program understand and demonstrate the capability to promote the success and well-being of each student, teacher, and leader by applying the knowledge, skills, and commitments necessary for effectively managed: (1) district systems; (2) resources; (3) human resources; and (4) policies and procedures.

Standard 7: Policy, Governance and Advocacy
Leadership candidates who successfully complete a district level educational leadership preparation program understand and demonstrate the capability to promote the success and well-being of each student, teacher, and leader by applying the knowledge, skills, and commitments necessary to: (1) understand and foster Board relations; (2) understand and manage effective systems for district governance; (3) understand and ensure compliance with policy, laws, rules and regulations; (4) understand and respond to local, state and national decisions; and (5) advocate for the needs and priorities of the district.

Standard 8: Internship and Clinical Practice
Program completers engaged in a substantial and sustained educational leadership internship experience that developed their capability **to promote the success and well-being of each student, teacher, and leader through field experiences and clinical practice within a building setting, monitored and evaluated by a qualified, on-site mentor.**

Appendix C

Post-Dyadic Interview Questionnaire

For the following question, please rate each statement on a 4-point Likert scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree.

Question 1: During the interview, I felt comfortable being able to answer questions honestly in the presence of my co-worker.

- o Strongly Disagree
- o Disagree
- o Agree
- o Strongly Agree

Appendix D

Introduction Email and Study Information - Superintendent

Date

Dear Superintendent _____,

My name is Casey van Harssel. I am the Jr/Sr. High School Principal in East Rochester. In addition, I am a doctoral candidate in the Executive Leadership Program at St. John Fisher College. As a requirement for my Ed.D degree in Executive Leadership, I am conducting a research study involving leaders in the field of K-12 education. I would like to invite you to participate in the study by allowing me to interview you. As a follow-up to this email, I will contact your administrative assistant to set up a time to discuss this research study further.

The topic of my study is the partnership that forms between some, but not all, principals and their superintendents. To gain insights into the complex relationship that exists from two educational leaders who function as partners in some aspects of their roles, I will be conducting dyadic (pair) interviews with a superintendent and one of his or her principals. Critical to this study, the superintendent will need to provide the names of principals that they consider a leadership partner using the following definition:

> ***Partnership:*** *Interactions between individuals within organizations working beyond the traditional organizational levels (Kolk, Vock, & van Dolen, 2016). As an extension, these partnerships have been described as cross-boundary partnerships because they cross established boundaries in terms of job responsibility, title, influence, and decision-making power (Lawson et al., 2017).*

The dyadic interview can take place in your school district and may take approximately 45-60 minutes. The interview will be audio-recorded. There is no preparation needed for the interview. Your participation or non-participation in this research study will not impact any current or future professional relationships or collaboration with your institution.

If you participate and become uncomfortable answering the questions, you can choose not to answer. In addition, this study is voluntary, and you may withdraw your participation at any time.

In appreciation of your willingness to meet me for the interview and your time, you will receive a $25 Visa gift card upon completion of the interview.

Thank you for your consideration. Please feel free to contact me at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ with any study-related questions or concerns.

Please see additional information on the study and confidentiality attached. Also, this information will be reviewed at the time of the interview and you will be asked to sign the Informed Consent Form prior to participation.

Sincerely,

Casey M. van Harssel
Education Doctoral Candidate, Executive Leadership
St. John Fisher College, Rochester, NY

Appendix E

Introduction Email and Study Information – Principal

Date

Dear Principal _____,

My name is Casey van Harssel. I am the Jr/Sr. High School Principal in East Rochester. In addition, I am a doctoral candidate in the Executive Leadership Program at St. John Fisher College. As a requirement for my Ed.D degree in Executive Leadership, I am conducting a research study involving leaders in the field of K-12 education. I would like to invite you to participate in the study by allowing me to interview you. As a follow-up to this email, I will contact your administrative assistant to set up a time to discuss this research study further.

The topic of my study is the partnership that forms between some, but not all, principals and their superintendents. To gain insights into the complex relationship that exists between two educational leaders who function as a partnership, I will be conducting dyadic (pair) interviews with a superintendent and one of his or her principals. Critical to this study, I am inviting principals for this study using the list provided to me from each superintendent that included principals he or she considers a leadership partner using the following definition:

> ***Partnership:*** *Interactions between individuals within organizations working beyond the traditional organizational levels (Kolk, Vock, & van Dolen, 2016). As an extension, these partnerships have been described as cross-boundary partnerships because they cross established boundaries in terms of job responsibility, title, influence, and decision-making power (Lawson et al., 2017).*

After communicating with _____ (Superintendent), he (or she) felt you were one of his (or her) principals that would meet the objectives of the study around partnerships.

The dyadic interview will take place in your school district and may take approximately 45-60 minutes. The interview will be audio-recorded. There is no preparation needed for the interview. Your participation or non-participation in this research study will not impact any current or future professional relationships or collaboration with your institution.

If you participate and become uncomfortable answering the questions, you can choose not to answer. In addition, this study is voluntary, and you may withdraw your participation at any time.

In appreciation of your willingness to meet me for the interview and your time, you will receive a $25 Visa gift card upon completion of the interview.

Thank you for your consideration. Please feel free to contact me at ████████ or ████████████ with any study related questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Casey M. van Harssel
Education Doctoral Candidate, Executive Leadership
St. John Fisher College, Rochester, NY

Appendix F

Interview Protocol (Principal-Superintendent Partnership)

Introduction:
Thank you both for agreeing to meet with me today. I am a doctoral candidate at St. John Fisher College who is conducting research on the partnership that forms between some principals and their superintendents. The purpose of our interview today is for me to gain insights on the complex relationship that exists from two educational leaders who function in a partnership role in part of their daily responsibilities. For the purpose of this study, I define partnership, using research literature (Kolk, Vock, & van Dolen, 2016; Lawson et al., 2017), as interactions between individuals within organizations working beyond the traditional organizational levels. As an extension, these partnerships have been described as cross-boundary partnerships because they cross established boundaries in terms of job responsibility, title, influence, and decision-making power.

You were selected as a leadership pair that meets the criteria of the partnership definition explained in this protocol. All participants in this research study are employed in suburban districts in Mason County (pseudonym). The interview may last approximately one hour and all comments will be kept confidential. As this is a dyadic interview, I ask that you not share comments made by the other person during this interview. Your name and school will not be connected to any specific comments or conclusions articulated in this study. If specific quotes are used, your position may be identified (example, superintendent) but not your school or district. Furthermore, five other principal-superintendent pairs are being interviewed for this study.

With your permission, I will be recording our interview today for purposes of transcription. The recording will not be used in any publication or presentation. Lastly, I will provide you an opportunity to review your transcript, so you can clarify or adapt any comments you may have made during our conversation. Do you have any questions before we start?

Interview Protocol (Principal-Superintendent Partnership)

Interview Location: _____   Date:

Participant Names: _____   Time:

Question 1 (RQ1). Let's begin with telling me how your partnership developed.

    Probes:
- How long have you both worked in the role or principal and superintendent together?
- Tell me about your history of working together in other roles.
- How has your communication evolved over the years?
- How were formal and informal boundaries determined?

- In evolutionary theory, there are two ways that partnerships form: gradual evolution and punctuated evolution. While gradual evolution reflects slight changes in a partnership over time, punctuated evolution is a significant change in a partnership, often after a major event, over a relatively short period of time. Which describes the formation of your partnership and describe why you feel this way?

Question 2 (RQ1). Over the course of your tenure together, can you share a time when a decision needed to be made and you disagreed on the course of action?

Probes:
- Was there a level of compromise that occurred?
- In the end, how was the final decision made?
- Did either of you share your differing opinion on what decision should be made? Explain.
- In what ways, if any, did this situation impact the partnership?
- Describe any period of repair needed
- (Question asked to the principal) What made you comfortable disagreeing with your superintendent?

Question 3 (RQ 1). Partnerships can be complicated. What factors, do you believe, have allowed you to develop/maintain/repair your partnership?

Probe:
- Tell me about an example that highlights one or more of these factors.

Question 4 (RQ 2). Has your relationship/partnership presented any challenges at the school or district level?

Probes:
- How were these challenged managed?
- What misperceptions exist about how you two work together?

Question 5 (RQ 2). What role do you think your partnership has played in the effectiveness of your organization?

Probes:
- What specific steps or strategies do you follow, as a pair, in order to impact organizational effectiveness?
- How does your partnership help align the mission and vision of the school and district?
- Describe how your partnership helps the success of all students within your district.
  - (If specific subgroups are not mentioned, emphasize *all students* by asking about subgroups)
- How has the partnership impacted your ability to grow, and learn, as a principal and superintendent?

Question 6. Our interview is coming to a close. Are there any key aspects, or anecdotes, of your partnership that you would like to add?

Appendix G

Alignment of Interview Protocol with Research Questions and Framework

Research Question	Interview Protocol Question	Alignment to West & Derrington (2009) framework

RQ 1.
 	
How do principals and superintendents develop, maintain and repair aspects of a partnership in the form of a non-hierarchical working relationship?
	1. Let's begin with telling me how your partnership developed.
	  Probes:
	    • How long have you both worked in the role or principal & superintendent together?
	    • Tell me about your history of working together in other roles.
	    • How has your communication evolved over the years?
	    • How were formal and informal boundaries determined?
	    • In evolutionary theory, there are two ways that partnerships form: gradual evolution and punctuated evolution. While gradual evolution reflects slight changes in a partnership over time, punctuated evolution is a significant change in a partnership, often after a major event, over a relatively short period of time. Which describes the formation of your partnership and describe why you feel this way?
		• Leadership teaming
		• Leadership team essentials
		• Leadership qualities

	2. Over the course of your tenure together, can you share a time when a decision needed to be made and you disagreed on the course of action?
	  Probes:
	    • Was there a level of compromise that occurred?
	    • In the end, how was the final decision made?
	    • Did either of you share your differing opinion on what decision should be made? Explain.
	    • In what ways, if any, did this situation impact the partnership?
	    • Describe any period of repair needed
		• Leadership teaming
		• Leadership qualities
		• Leadership team essentials
		• Leadership learning

Research Question	Interview Protocol Question	Alignment to West & Derrington (2009) framework
	• (Question asked to the principal) What made you comfortable disagreeing with your superintendent?	
	3. Partnerships can be complicated. What factors, do you believe, have allowed you to develop/maintain/repair your partnership? Probe: • Tell me about an example that highlights one or more of these factors?	• Leadership qualities • Leadership team essentials
RQ 2. **How does an established partnership between principals and superintendents contribute to organizational effectiveness and accountability?**	4. Has your relationship/partnership presented any challenges at the school or district level? Probes: • How were these challenged managed? • What misperceptions exist about how you two work together?	• Leadership team essentials • Leadership learning
	5. What role do you think your partnership has played in the effectiveness of your organization? Probes: • What specific steps or strategies do you follow, as a pair, in order to impact organizational effectiveness? • How does your partnership help align the mission and vision of the school and district? • Describe how your partnership helps the success of all students within your district. ▪ (If specific subgroups are not mentioned, emphasize *all students* by asking about subgroups)	• Leadership teaming • Leadership qualities • Leadership team essentials • Leadership learning

Research Question	Interview Protocol Question	Alignment to West & Derrington (2009) framework
	• How has the partnership impacted your ability to grow, and learn, as a principal and superintendent?	

Appendix H

St. John Fisher College
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of study: An Examination of the Principal-Superintendent Partnership in Suburban School Districts

Name of researcher: Casey M. van Harssel

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Marie Cianca   **Phone for further information:** ███████

Purpose of study: The purpose of the study is to examine the principal-superintendent relationship in suburban districts using the four components of West and Derrington's (2009) framework, in terms of a partnership within a traditionally hierarchical system.

Place of study: Interviews will take place in various districts, all within 40 miles of the institution.

Length of participation: One dyadic interview lasting no more than 60 minutes.

Method(s) of data collection: Dyadic interviews, demographic questions, observation notes during interviews.

Risks and benefits: The expected risks and benefits of participation in this study are explained below:

Minimal risk exists, as the probability of and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during routine tests. Participants will be audio-recorded during interviews. There are no additional anticipated emotional or physical risks associated with participating in this study. Participation or non-participation in this research study will not impact professional relationships or collaboration with the researcher or research institution. By participating in this study, participants will contribute to study results, which will add to the current body of research on the principal-superintendent working relationship.

Method for protecting confidentiality/privacy of data collected: All consent is voluntary. Pseudonyms will be assigned to all participants. Participants' names and identifying information will remain confidential and will not appear in transcripts, analysis, or the final study. Written transcripts will be stored in an office in a locked cabinet accessible only to the researcher for a period of 5 years after the successful defense of the dissertation and then shredded. When not in use, the audio and electronic files of the data, as well as interview transcriptions, will be secured in the same cabinet with access only to the researcher for a period of 5 years after the successful defense of the dissertation and then destroyed.
Your rights: As a research participant, you have the right to:

1. Have the purpose of the study, and the expected risks and benefits fully explained to you before you choose to participate.
2. Withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.
3. Refuse to answer a particular question without penalty.
4. Be informed of the results of the study.

I have read the above, received a copy of this form, and I agree to participate in the above-named study.

_____   _____   _____

Print name (Participant)   Signature   Date

_____   _____   _____

Print name (Investigator)   Signature   Date

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please contact the researcher(s) listed above. If you experience emotional or physical discomfort due to participation in this study, please contact your personal health care provider or an appropriate crisis service provider (███████████████████████████████).

The Institutional Review Board of St. John Fisher College has reviewed this project. For any concerns regarding this study/or if you feel that your rights as a participant (or the rights of another participant) have been violated or caused you undue distress (physical or emotional distress), please contact Jill Rathbun by phone during normal business hours at ███████████████████. She will contact a supervisory IRB official to assist you.

All digital audio recordings and transcriptions of interviews will be maintained using a private, locked, and password-protected file and password-protected computer stored securely in the private home of the principal researcher. Electronic files will include assigned identity codes and pseudonyms; they will not include actual names or any information that could personally identify or connect participants to this study. Other materials, including notes or paper files related to data collection and analysis, will be stored securely in unmarked boxes, locked inside a cabinet in the private home of the principal researcher. Only the researcher will have access to electronic or paper records. The digitally recorded audio data will be kept by this researcher for a period of 5 years following publication of the dissertation. Signed informed consent documents will be kept for 5 years after publication. All paper records will be cross-cut shredded and professionally delivered for incineration. Electronic records will be cleared, purged, and destroyed from the hard drive and all devices such that restoring data is not possible.