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**The Role of the Superintendent in Implementing Districtwide Teacher Salary  
Reform**

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**The Role of the Superintendent in Implementing Districtwide Teacher Salary  
Reform**

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Michael Tuan Khang Dang

**Treatise**

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## **Dedication**

Công cha như núi Thái Sơn  
Nghĩa mẹ như nước trong nguồn chảy ra  
Một lòng thờ mẹ kính cha  
Cho tròn chữ hiếu mới là đạo con

In Loving Memory of my father

Vincent Thien Van Dang

April 12, 1938 to February 2, 2014

And In Honor of my mother

Theresa Xuyen Dang

With much love, I thank you for seeing me through this.

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# **The Role of the Superintendent in Implementing Districtwide Teacher Salary Reform**

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With the need for greater understanding of the role of the superintendent in teacher salary reform, the qualitative study to explore the phenomenon of implementing districtwide teacher salary reform with superintendents of public schools in Texas was conducted. This study proposes to examine the role of the superintendent in teacher salary reform in Texas. It analyzes the perceptions of current and former superintendents in “first mover” districts with substantial experience involved in the implementation of a districtwide strategic teacher salary plan. This study illuminated superintendents’ considerations and priorities during the implementation process as well as their reflections of the strengths and weaknesses of the resulting strategic teacher compensation plan. This qualitative phenomenological study answered the following questions: (a) What considerations are presented by superintendents in the development and implementation of a districtwide strategic teacher compensation plan? (b) What priorities are given by superintendents related to considerations in the development and implementation of a districtwide strategic teacher compensation plan? (c) What differences and commonalities are expressed by superintendents in comparable school districts regarding considerations and priorities? The phenomenological interview approach was used with a sample of three

superintendents of current and former superintendents in districts that implemented a districtwide strategic teacher compensation plan. The three one-on-one interview participants were superintendents of Texas first mover school districts that implemented a districtwide strategic teacher compensation plan. Each one-on-one interview was conducted in person and lasted about 60 to 90 minutes. The interviews were recorded and transcribed through Rev.com. The interview data yielded the following five themes about implementing a strategic compensations plan: (a) superintendents need to know the local context; (b) compensation needs to be linked to what the district values; (c) a school district cannot afford to reward high performing teachers if they carry the financial burden of low performing teachers; (d) if you have accountability without support, you have a climate of fear. The findings supported the applicability of Bolman and Deal's framework and Olivarez's 10 functions of school districts to charter schools. Advocacy and education about leadership models is needed, and additional research for understanding the roles other stakeholders, such as principals, play in the implementation of teacher salary reform.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

For over half a century, teachers have earned pay increases utilizing a salary structure that can be best described as steps and lanes (Odden & Kelley, 2002). Virtually all teachers across the nation are rewarded through a salary structure that is based entirely on years of service, often referred to as *steps*, and level of education, referred to as *lanes* (Podgursky, 2011). When it was first established, like other historical phases of teacher pay reform, the salary structure was developed to satisfy the needs of the organization and industry (Protsik, 1995). At the time, the need was normalizing or equalizing teacher salaries across gender and other social classifications (Odden & Kelley, 2002). With regard to addressing these specific needs, the structure was widely accepted as it was objective and easy to incorporate into the existing business model of the period. The single salary schedule has been around several decades and is considered today as the traditional salary structure (Odden & Kelley, 2011).

Over time, growing concerns over student achievement have sparked media interest as well as new legislation, resulting in increased accountability of districts, schools, and individual teachers (The New Teacher Project, 2014). As research has linked student achievement with teacher quality, the field of education looked, once again, to teacher salary reform (Oliver, 2016). More and more school districts and teachers within them recognize the traditional salary structure is not sufficient and needs to change. Educator salaries fall below those found in most professional fields, which have moved toward salary schedules that incorporate quality and effectiveness. The teaching profession continues to have difficulties adapting to changing market demands (Springer, 2009). In order to recruit highly qualified teachers and retain high achieving teachers, the teacher salary structure needs to move away from compensating teachers

simply for how long they have taught and move more toward compensating teachers for how well they have taught.

The discussion surrounding teacher pay reform is not a new one, even being referenced in the National Commission on Excellence in Education's 1983 report, *A Nation at Risk*. However, even to this day, a limited number of school districts have attempted to implement salary reform. Salary reform has resurfaced in practice in a handful of school districts in efforts to meet the needs of attracting and retaining quality teachers which these district hoped, in turn, would increase student achievement (Miles, Pinnington, & Bloom, 2015). These districts represent a group of particular interest as outliers among the nation's school districts that moved passed discussion and into action. What could account for this situation where the need for reform is evident, but the act of reform is not?

Examining the actions and practices of the superintendent may, in part, be the key to generating understanding about lack of action (Marzano & Waters, 2006). The role of the superintendent is an important factor in any educational reform, whether the reform is teacher pay or curricular standards. Superintendents are often pivotal players in maneuvering the political, financial, and instructional challenges required to lead change (Bolman & Deal, 2015). Bolman and Deal (2015) described four frames or lenses of organizational structure: structural, human resources, political, and symbolic. The four frames serve as "both windows on a territory and tools for navigation" (Bolman & Deal, 2015, p. 13) in understanding the leadership practices and their effects. The four frames provide superintendents with effective tools to understand what is occurring in the organizations while they manage change in politically charged, contentious, and complex systems (Olivarez, 2013; Pardina & Lewis, 2003).

Furthermore, the frames offer “the advantage of multiple angles to size up a situation” and understand what might be occurring with the leadership practices (Bolman & Deal, 2015, p. 328). Also, Bolman and Deal provided research related to the reframing of organizations in general, and a school district is a specific type of organization. Olivarez (2013) described 10 functions specific to school districts. Olivarez (2013) also discussed how the role of the superintendent has “grown in both scope and complexity” (p. 11) and posited that “complex problems require integrated solutions” (p. 11). The literature is rich with studies regarding the challenges to change that confront public schools desiring to reform teacher compensation; however, available research studies seem to be dominated with pay stipends rather than teacher salary structures. In addition, little research exists regarding the role of the superintendent in developing “an integrated vision and acquir[e] the practical capacity necessary to coordinate and manage a very complex set of district functions” as they navigate symbolic, political, structural, and human resource obstacles while implementing a districtwide strategic teacher compensation plan (Olivarez, 2013, p. 3).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Because the single salary schedule only awards pay based on years of experience and level of education, it fails to promote teacher effectiveness and fails to consider market demands (Podgursky, 2011). The literature increasingly showed this salary structure as not aligning with either the job market for college-educated workers or the goals of school districts. The current realities in education show that since teacher quality is the single most influential factor in improving student achievement, school districts should be leveraging its resources to this end (Goldhaber, 2009). Chait and Miller (2009) demonstrated how school districts struggle with attracting and retaining teachers in hard-to-staff schools and hard-to-staff subject areas. The

literature showed a strong case for moving away from the single salary schedule that does not reward teacher quality or efficacy in teacher pay; it not only does not encourage it but also discourages it (Hanushek, 2007). However, the literature revealed that no established framework exists to guide a school district through the process of reforming teacher salary structures.

Although no recognized comprehensive framework has been developed about superintendents' role in the implementation of teacher salary reform, a review of relevant literature on the subject allowed for identifying eight important areas for reforming strategic compensation plans (Miles et al., 2015). The areas include: (a) differentiate compensation based on roles and responsibilities; (b) set starting salaries to meet market demand; (c) align teacher compensation redesign with fair and proven teacher evaluation systems; (d) shift pay away from years of experience and advanced-degree attainment; (e) use compensation incentives to attract highly effective teachers to hard-to-staff schools, districts, and subjects; (f) emphasize extra pay for effectiveness and career pathways instead of small bonuses; (g) accelerate the timeline to earning the maximum salary where possible; and (h) allow teachers to opt-in to new compensation systems within a set timeframe. These areas accentuate the importance of the superintendent as playing a critical role in any school reform movement.

More research was needed to identify the specific leadership strategies implemented by superintendents who implement a strategic compensation plan that focuses on equitability, sustainability, and organizational stability. In addition, there was a gap in the literature related to superintendent leadership strategies for salary reform given the Olivarez's (2013) Ten Functions of School Districts within the five conceptualizations of the superintendency. Although there is a demonstrated gap in research on this topic with regard to the role of the superintendent in

implementing teacher salary reform, the findings contributed to the body of research on this topic.

### **Statement of the Purpose**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the phenomenon of implementing districtwide teacher salary reform with superintendents of public schools in Texas. This study provided information to school administrators and researchers about the considerations and priorities by superintendent in implementing teacher pay reform. This study examined superintendents' leadership perceptions and teacher compensation issues that affect school districts' operations in the state of Texas.

### **Research Questions**

This qualitative and phenomenological study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What considerations are presented by superintendents in the development and implementation of a districtwide strategic teacher compensation plan?
2. What priorities are given by superintendents related to considerations in the development and implementation of a districtwide strategic teacher compensation plan?
3. What differences and commonalities are expressed by superintendents in comparable school districts regarding considerations and priorities?

### **Significance and Rationale for Study**

Efforts to reform teacher compensation practices have steadily gained attention since the early- to mid-1980s, given the 1983 release of the National Commission on Excellence in Education's *A Nation at Risk* report (Springer, 2009). Research on pay-for-performance

programs in the United States “has tended to focus on short-run motivational effects, and this research is highly diverse in terms of methodology, target populations, and evaluated programs” (Springer, 2009, p. 2). Often noted by pay for performance critics, however, is the difficulty in accurately measuring the superintendent’s impact on student learning and the public misunderstanding that can occur regarding the awarding of bonuses (Eastridge, 2000). As a result, a lack of research on school district leadership and the implementation of a districtwide strategic teacher compensation plan. This study provided insightful information to strengthen the extant literature related to the role of the superintendent in this process by asking superintendents to discuss leadership perceptions and teacher compensation issues that affect school districts’ operations in the state of Texas. The study’s results might provide a better understanding of the complexities associated with the task of paying teachers appropriately. In addition, the study’s results might provide insight on superintendent leadership practices and/or common framework in teacher reform initiatives that can influence graduate programs preparing future superintendents.

### **Assumption**

The major assumption guiding the phenomenological study included participating superintendents would respond with honesty to the interview questions.

### **Limitations**

The limitations of this study were due to issues beyond the researcher's control that may prevent findings from generalizing statewide or nationally. Texas law was unique and might prevent the findings from applying to school districts in other states. Next, every school district operated differently and faced different challenges that generated different solutions. This study was conducted specifically to interview superintendents of school districts that fit the criteria of

“first mover districts” which contained the following recommendations as part of their comprehensive approach to redesign compensation: (a) base salary; (b) teacher effectiveness; (c) speed of salary growth; (d) career pathway opportunities; (e) incentives for hard-to-staff schools and positions; (f) bonuses, rewards, and recognition; and (g) the opt-in timeframe (Miles et al., 2015). Though the criteria helped to narrow the scope of the research, it limited the transferability to districts that may lack one or more of these elements. Finally, unconsciously held biases by the researcher, a charter school assistant superintendent, might have affected the generalizability. Therefore, the researcher maintained a reflection log to identify and overcome those biases.

### **Definition of Terms**

Key terms related to the functioning the charter school district are defined in this section of the study.

**Alternative compensation.** A salary system in which employee base pay increases are determined by factors other than educational attainment and years of service. Such factors differ from district to district but could include such components as evaluation scores, value-added, peer evaluation, additional duties, parent/student surveys, working in a hard-to-staff subject/building, or skill attainment (Douglas, 2012).

**Alternative salary schedule.** A salary schedule that uses a component, often a performance measure, in addition to or in place of education and experience to determine base pay. For example, a schedule that determines the amount of an educator’s yearly base pay increase based on his or her evaluation score is an alternative salary schedule. Alternative salary schedules are subject to State Board of Education approval (Tennessee Department of Education, 2013, p. 6).

**Base pay (base salary).** An individual's salary, excluding any additional compensation in the form of bonuses, stipends, or supplements for additional work or responsibilities (Tennessee Department of Education, 2013).

**Labor market merit-based pay.** The alignment of teacher salaries with the salaries available in other labor markets. It suggests that the salaries offered by competing employers should be a central consideration when setting pay levels for teachers as a profession or within particular subject or geographic areas.

**Opt-in/opt-out provision.** Individuals may choose whether to participate in a program. This provision is most often associated with alternative salary schedules and is not required (Tennessee Department of Education, 2013, p. 6).

**Performance pay, pay for performance, or performance-based compensation.** Programs that base pay on either teacher performance (evaluation or professional development) or student performance indicators (value-added or gains scores on standardized tests, objective evaluations of student performance, or other valid and reliable assessments of student performance (Roland & Potemski, 2009).

**Traditional salary schedule (or step and lane schedule).** A salary schedule that uses years of experience and education exclusively to determine an educator's increases in base pay. Traditional schedules may follow the same structure as the state minimum salary schedule. Salary schedules that modify the amount of the step increases given for experience or change the structure of the education lanes may still be considered a traditional schedule as long as they meet or exceed the relevant state minimums (Tennessee Department of Education, 2013, p. 6).

## **Summary**

There is a need to investigate superintendents' perceptions and leadership practices within the context of implementation of a districtwide strategic compensation plan. This chapter provided the purpose of this phenomenological study to explore both the perceived prioritization by superintendents as well as the perceived necessary considerations required for the planning and implementation of a districtwide strategic compensation plan. The chapter also included research questions, the problem, the significance, and the limitations. Chapter 2 provides the review of the literature on teacher pay reform as well as additional overviews about two dimensions of leadership: Olivarez's Ten Functions of School Districts and Bolman and Deal's Four Frames model. Chapter 3 provides the methods employed to conduct this qualitative and phenomenological study of superintendents implementing districtwide teacher compensation plans in the state of Texas in districts that possessed the elements of first-mover school districts. Chapter 4 provides the findings that result from the data collection. Chapter 5 concludes the study.

## **Chapter 2: Review of the Literature**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore superintendents' perceptions and leadership practices within the context of implementation of a districtwide strategic compensation plan in the state of Texas. This study provided information to school administrators and researchers on the needs of a school district, as seen by the superintendent, to merit the implementation of a districtwide teacher compensation plan and the essential actions for its implementation. To conduct the review of the literature related to applying the Olivarez's Ten Functions of School Districts and Bolman and Deal's leadership frames with the superintendent leadership studies were sought using Google; ERIC; and EBSCOHosts's Academic Search Premiere, Psychological and Sociological Collection, and Professional Development databases. This chapter begins with the historical foundations of teacher pay reform.

### **Brief History of Teacher Pay Reform**

Protsik (1995) described the following three major phases of historical teacher salary reform, or pay structures, applied in America since the 19th century: (a) boarding round, (b) position-based salary schedule, and (c) the single salary schedule. Each of these three phases reflected the function of schools with respect to the economic and societal needs at that time. Subsequently, changes in the economic and societal needs would result in the shifting from one phase to another (Springer, 2009).

Boarding round. From an economic standpoint, the boarding round phase mirrored the barter-based system of economy where people traded goods for services in the 19th century (Odden & Kelley, 2002). Teachers traded their skills and services in exchange for weekly room and board at the various homes of students. During this time, schools were designed and

functioned to provide only basic academic skills and had a greater emphasis on the moral development of children (Springer, 2009). As such, most teachers received little preparation or training, and few had more than an elementary education themselves (Springer, 2009). The boarding round pay structure incentivized teachers to stay connected to their community while encouraging positive moral standings (Odden & Kelley, 2002). With respect to the societal needs of the time, teaching was not meant to be a career or profession, but rather a source of supplemental income for men outside of the farming season or, for women, a transition between living at home with parents and finding a husband (Protsik, 1995). As a result, teacher retention was practically nonexistent, with “female teachers averaging eighteen months,” and male teachers opting into other jobs available at the time (Protisk, 1995, p. 4). With industrialization, rural communities gave way to urban cities which increased both the number of students attending public schools and introduced new educational needs brought on by economic trade (Odden & Kelley, 2002). The boarding round pay structure was abandoned when the shift of the economy from an agrarian class to a more urban, industrial one created the need for a larger more qualified worker pool (Odden & Kelley, 2002).

Position-based salary schedule. A cash-based system replaced the barter system of economics (Protsik, 1995). As the economy began to move from rural to industrial, employers required higher levels of education in the workforce, albeit narrow and specialized (Consortium for Policy Research in Education, 2012). In response, teacher compensation evolved into a position-based salary system to meet the needs of the teaching profession (Odden & Kelley, 2012). Schools began to mirror similar organizational structures to those found in the burgeoning industrial society, becoming more bureaucratic and systematic (Protsik, 1995). Teaching, as a profession, changed with increased pre-service education requirements, and teacher preparation

became more uniform but reflected the societal biases of the time (Odden & Kelley, 2012). According to the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (2012), this system “paid elementary teachers less than secondary teachers, in part due to the differences in education required for these positions, yet also paid women and minority teachers less than non-minority males” (p. 10).

Though there were some apparent disadvantages of the position-based salary schedule with regard to gender and racial equity in retrospect, at the time it was aligned with the “strategic aspects of the economy and school systems” (Consortium for Policy Research in Education, 2012, p. 12). The need for reform grew as societal forces created a movement against the overt discrimination of women and minorities, and the economic need for more teachers with higher levels of qualifications eliminated the leverage schools had to continue a stratified salary scale based on gender and race (Protsik, 1995).

Single-salary schedule. In the early 1920s, the single-salary schedule emerged. Its original purpose was to ensure gender and race equality by eliminating salary disparities between elementary teachers (who were and still are mostly female) and secondary teachers (who were mostly male (Hanushek, 2007)). The single-salary schedule eliminated the disparity created by the previous system by setting up a schedule that paid equally for teachers with comparable years of service and qualifications without regard to grade level or educator gender or race (Consortium for Policy Research in Education, 2012).

This system was objective and measurable, complimented the structure of the organizations operating during this era, and was characterized by bureaucracy and clear hierarchies (Wragg, 2004). Some school districts have adjusted the single salary schedule to

some degree and created some new salary differentials (Hanushek, 2007). These adjustments are modest in nature, so the basic salary structure remains virtually unchanged (Koppich, 2008).

### **The Next Phase of Teacher Pay Reform**

The social and economic landscape in the US has changed over the years due to the increased globalization of the economy (The New Teacher Project, 2014). As such, the single salary schedule has been widely criticized for failing to acknowledge prevailing market demands (Hanushek, 2016). Unlike the early 1900s when teaching was not perceived as a skilled profession, there is an undeniable need for teachers who are experts in their fields and content areas, particularly in math and science (Odden & Kelley, 2002).

According to The New Teacher Project (2014), teachers with specialized competencies and training have more options and choices for deciding how, when, and where to enter education. Graduates from technical fields who choose teaching as a career encounter not only earning a lower starting salary comparatively, but even more problematic, there is a wage gap that only increases after each subsequent year of teaching under the single salary structure than choosing a career in the technical field (The New Teacher Project, 2014). Consequently, Dee and Keys (2004) argued that the single salary schedule discourages high-quality individuals from entering and remaining in a teaching career.

Changes in the social context of teacher compensation have been observed as the public has demanded high standards and accountability in the field of education which has had difficulty adapting to an increasingly diverse student population (Hanushek, 2016). Experience and advanced degrees have been shown to have little correlation to teachers' potential for improving student learning (Hanushek, 2016). According to Snyder, de Brey, and Dillow (2016), over half of all U.S. teachers hold masters or higher degrees, and these teachers earn

about 20% higher salaries than teachers with only bachelor's degrees. These higher degrees, on average, offer no influence on student performance in the classroom (Hanushek, 2016). The market demands additional dollars for additional work, and a compensation system without a means to address this problem can dissuade teachers from doing or trying strategies they might not otherwise choose to do (Koppich & Rigby, 2009).

Despite its perceived and documented advantages, the single salary schedule was not designed to include student academic results as a factor in awarding teacher salaries, nor can it account for the increasing level of knowledge and skills needed for educators in today's schools (Hanushek, 2016).

### **A Nation at Risk**

In April 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education formed by the U.S. Secretary of Education released the report *A Nation at Risk* stating:

Our Nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world. This report is concerned with only one of the many causes and dimensions of the problem, but it is the one that undergirds American prosperity, security, and civility. We report to the American people that while we can take justifiable pride in what our schools and colleges have historically accomplished and contributed to the United States and the well-being of its people, the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people. What was unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur – others are matching and surpassing our educational attainments.

If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war. As it stands, we have allowed this to happen to ourselves. We have even squandered the gains in student achievement made in the wake of the Sputnik challenge. Moreover, we have dismantled essential support systems which helped make those gains possible. We have, in effect, been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral, educational disarmament. (p. 1)

The National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) implied American schools were getting worse. Test scores were falling, showing that millions of Americans were illiterate and that the United States was falling below other countries in the areas of math and science. Also, the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) stated U.S. teachers did not have enough education nor were they paid enough for their jobs. The nation's entire educational system was deemed subpar, leading to a national crisis. The implication, according to the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983), was that other countries could surpass the United States in science and technology. Losing ground in science and technology was a significant issue, because America had long been the leader in those areas and could suffer economic and social repercussions if no longer a leader (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The National Commission on Excellence in Education did not just attempt to illustrate new challenges economically and societally in a new global competitive arena but also offered specific recommendations to overcome them. In order to reverse the course of the educational trajectory, increased rigor, new standards, and improved teacher pay were recommended for implementation in the nation's schools.

## **A Nation Still at Risk**

Thirty years after the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, most school districts had worked to address the National Commission on Excellence in Education's 1983 recommendations for schools to adopt more rigorous and measurable standards for learning (Graham, 2013). Every state in the nation had adopted academic standards, such as the Common Core State Standards or the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) to ensure all students received the necessary rigor for success during college and in their careers (Graham, 2013). With respect to improved teacher preparation and teacher pay; however, the key recommendation of increasing teachers' salaries remained unaddressed.

The National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) recommended that salaries for teaching professionals be increased to be professionally competitive, market-sensitive, and performance-based. Salary, promotion, tenure, and retention decisions needed to be tied to an effective evaluation system that included peer review opportunities to ensure that superior teachers would be "rewarded, average ones encouraged, and poor ones either improved or terminated" (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 38). The same indictment of shortages of quality teachers has remained a problem since the time of the report, and stagnant student achievement continues to challenge educators and administrators (The New Teacher Project, 2014).

## **Teacher Quality**

Education research has shown teacher quality is the single strongest determinant of student achievement (Goldhaber, 2009). Hanushek (2016) reported the disparity between a *very good teacher* and a *very bad teacher* to a full year of student learning is large. The very good

teacher can produce 1.5 years growth and the very bad teacher yields, at best, only 0.5 years growth (Hanushek, 2016).

Quality teachers have the ability to close the achievement gap. By comparing student achievement between teachers with different levels of efficacy, Ferguson (1991) showed half the variation in achievement gaps are attributed to teacher quality. Finally, teacher quality has been shown to have a cumulative effect on student achievement. Sanders and Rivers (1996) reported students taught for 3 consecutive years in classrooms with ineffective teachers might never catch up academically to their counterparts being taught by effective instructors.

Ensuring every classroom is taught by a high-quality teacher is one of the most important actions of a school district (Hanushek, 2016). According to Curtis and Wurtzel (2010):

The purpose of developing and implementing a human capital strategy is to drive significant and lasting improvement to overall student achievement. To do so, we must improve the quality of teaching and reduce the variance in teaching quality. (p. 10)

If relying solely on the single salary structure and how it rewards teachers, quality is a function of years of experience and advanced college degrees. For example, Hanushek (2016) showed these factors only to be weakly correlated with the quality of teachers.

Defining teacher quality is difficult and, for the sake of transparency, it is important to know that definitions of teacher quality range from relying solely on student achievement as measured by standardized test scores to more complex dimensions that include (in addition to test scores) descriptors of the teaching practices and collaborative and cooperative practices (Kennedy, 2010). Goldhaber (2009) argued, however, that “teacher quality is the ability of teachers to contribute in measurable ways to student gains on standardized tests” (p. 4).

Moreover, the well-documented inequitable distribution of teachers (as measured by their experience levels and credentials) across schools and students is clearly evident in school districts nationally (Hanushek, 2016). Considerable inequity has been found in the distribution of teachers both between school districts and within school districts (Subjinski, 2015). The neediest students tend to be assigned to classrooms led by the least credentialed teachers (Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002), even though public schools serving high-poverty students has been encouraged to offer teachers significant monetary incentives to compensate them for the difficulty of their working conditions (Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2001).

Unfortunately, pay systems in public education typically do not recognize the labor market reality that some teachers have more competitive and financially lucrative opportunities outside of education than others (Podgursky, 2011). Nor do some pay systems allow for schools and classrooms that are tougher to staff based on particular job openings (e.g., science or mathematics; Podgursky, 2011). But it should come as no surprise that few school systems' leaders are willing or able to experiment, both technically and politically, with compensation reform, given the significant hurdles to alternatives of the single-salary schedule that are seen as controversial (Goldhaber, 2009).

### **Teacher Recruitment**

According to the U.S. Department of Education, with the salary adjusted for inflation, in 1983 on average, teachers earned \$46,700 annually, and in 2010, they earned \$54,900 annually (Snyder et al., 2016). While *A Nation at Risk* recommended “professionally competitive” salaries for teachers, most school districts have not successfully attained this goal (1983, p. 38). Further, Chait and Miller (2009) demonstrated salary gaps between teachers and non-teachers with similar technical expertise and training negatively impact the numbers entering the teaching

profession and the number of teachers who stay (Chait & Miller, 2009). Teachers and potential teachers do indeed take into account financial factors when deciding to enter and stay in the education field (Chait & Miller, 2009).

Teacher recruitment continues to be an issue, and the supply chain of quality teachers cannot meet the growing demand for teachers to teach the increasing numbers of students in America's classrooms. To compound the problem, 42% of current teachers in the United States were over the age of 50 in 2005 (Chait & Miller, 2009).

Additional factors have become significant following the initial release of *A Nation At Risk* in 1983 and have contributed to the issue of teacher shortages. These factors by themselves contribute to the increasing demand for teachers (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). These factors include an increase in school enrollment due to increased immigration and higher birth rates for some races and ethnicities and are magnified when coupled with declining class sizes due to state policies that impose class size caps (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016).

With regard to the teacher labor market, candidates' decisions about teaching at a certain school are affected by financial incentives (Sutcher et al., 2016). Higher salaries are needed for these schools' teachers to recognize the market demands for hiring highly qualified teachers teaching in schools serving low-income communities; higher salaries for these harder-to-staff schools' teachers could have a positive impact on recruitment (Borman & Dowling, 2008).

### **Teacher Attrition**

In addition to teacher recruitment issues, teacher attrition is another facet of the teacher shortage problem (Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002). While teacher recruitment efforts bring teachers into the education field, teacher attrition represents the rate at which teachers leave the

field (Borman & Dowling, 2008). Almost 20% of new public school teachers leave after the first year, and almost half leave after their first 5 years (Sutcher et al., 2016). Margolis (2008) studied teacher attrition and found teacher salaries are significantly low compared to the market's needs and causes highly skilled potential teachers to opt for more competitive higher earning positions in other fields. Margolis added "retaining the best teachers will depend on salary reforms, including merit pay, so that the talented can afford to stay in the profession and be compensated justly for their gifts" (p. 4).

Podgursky (2011) noted teacher attrition is a more complex problem than teacher recruitment due to the factors involved beyond only salary. When teachers decide to leave the teaching profession, they are influenced by school conditions, their perceptions of preparedness and effectiveness, and levels of in-service support (Podgursky, 2011). Jensen, Yamashiro, and Tibbetts (2010) showed lack of support and resources influence attrition. Johnson and Birkeland (2003) found "few prospects for improvement or success, either in their schools or in other public schools" (p. 584) were the reasons some teachers opted to leave the teaching profession.

Without embedded support for professional growth and development, novice teachers are at risk of exiting the profession, as shown in a study of the attrition rates of first-year teachers in both low and high performing schools in New York City (Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002). Lankford et al. (2002) found less effective teachers had higher attrition rates than their more effective counterparts. The attrition rates are even greater for teachers working in low-performing schools. Furthermore, at low-performing schools, more effective teachers are shown to voluntarily self-select into higher-performing schools whereas less effective teachers simply quit the profession, or worse, transfer to a low-performing school (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2008).

## **Changing Workforce**

Potential teachers represent a different generation than teachers who stay in the field and offer a different context of work viewpoint in an era of competitive career options (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). According to Birkeland (2003), the potential teachers entering the workforce today are most likely born between 1979 and 1995 and likely represent just under 20% of the teacher workforce. The number of teachers falling into the demographic is likely to grow; therefore, the cultural and societal subtexts of this generation of teachers need to be addressed by educational leaders if they are to remain working in the educational field (Boyd et al., 2008). To meet new expectations and to promote job satisfaction and retention, Margolis (2008) suggested exploring merit pay options, job differentiation, and university and school partnerships.

Interestingly, Margolis (2008) indicated this new generation of teachers supports removing ineffective teachers from classrooms. Because all teachers are rewarded according to their years of service and levels of education, no extrinsic penalty for ineffective teaching exists (Hanushek, 2007). The educational system does not always ensure the most qualified teachers stay in and the least qualified teachers exit the profession. In fact, Dee and Keys (2004) showed the opposite to be true: Ineffective teachers under the single salary schedule are more likely to remain in the field, while effective teachers opt to pursue other, more lucrative career opportunities.

## **Arguments for Salary Structure Change**

A salary structure that pays teachers solely on the basis of years and units has the advantage of simplicity, but it also has a dated definition of fairness and produces neither professionally competitive nor market-driven salaries (Podgursky, 2011). By design, it does not offer rewards to promote quality of teaching, and it is built on the false premise that all teaching

positions have the same level of difficulty and the same teacher supply with which to fill them. Hanushek (2007) pointed to growing concern about the single salary schedule dissuading the most capable job candidates from entering the teaching profession. Some researchers documented higher-ability college graduates are less likely to enter teaching and the most academically talented female students are much less likely to enter teaching in the 21st century than in the 1970s, and the efficacy of the single salary schedule has been questioned in this regard (Hanushek, 2007).

Proponents of salary reform argue that improving student achievement is the ultimate goal and salary structures should meet that goal (Hanushek, 2016). Experience and advanced degrees, representing the basis of the single salary schedule, account for only a small percentage of the identifiable contributions of a teacher (Goldhaber, 2009). Furthermore, the single salary schedule ties all teachers to the same slow salary advancement (Koppich, 2008). Changing the salary structure to incorporate teacher performance may attract potential teachers, retain effective teachers, and repel ineffective teachers (Lazear, 2003). Lazear (2003) argued that systemically, not only could this alternative salary structure incentivize individual teachers to become more effective, it could also systematically increase the teacher workforce as a whole with selective retention of the effective teachers.

Strategic compensation plans are within school districts' ability to change (Strunk & Zeehandelaar, 2011). Such changes are currently supported by policies found at the local, state, and national levels. The single salary schedule impedes efforts to align pay and performance after hiring (Heneman & Werner, 2006). For example, approximately 1% of all teachers working in urban school districts either are dismissed or do not have their contract renewed each year (Jacob & Springer, 2007).

## **Strategic Compensation and Teacher Salary Reform**

Battle for Kids (2010) discussed strategic compensation as the following:

The alignment of compensation with desired organizational outcomes. While this is a relatively new concept for educational organizations, some aspects of strategic compensation have been attempted before. "Merit pay" or "performance pay" are not new ideas and do not have a particularly good track record of success in the United States. In the 1970's and 1980's, the federal government and several school districts experimented with performance-based compensation approaches. Many of these systems featured small rewards and poor measurement systems and were fraught with supervisor abuses where the compensation system was used as a retaliatory or control device on employees.

Strategic compensation is different than these previous approaches in that it calls on organizations to align compensation with organizational goals and also provide supports and quality measurement systems to support the achievement of those goals. (p. 3)

Strategic compensation is often mischaracterized as performance pay (Patterson, 2011).

In and of itself, it may very well incorporate performance pay as a component, but conceptually, it "organizes the mix of salary supplements that most districts currently put on top of the teacher salary schedule; performance pay is only one type of supplement included in strategic compensation" (Patterson, 2011, p. 2). The common feature in all strategic compensation models is the alignment of teacher pay and district policies, practices, and systems with teacher quality as defined by student achievement (Education Resource Strategies, 2012). In order for a school district to introduce strategic compensation, most districts must simultaneously address the following: (a) teacher recruitment and retention, (b) objectives and metrics to measure student learning and progress, (c) student assessments, (d), teacher appraisals, (e) professional

development, and (f) human resources pathways for professional advancement (Patterson, 2011). Strategic compensation imbeds teacher salary reforms in larger efforts to improve classroom instruction and student achievement. In the literature, much confusion occurs due to a lack of common vocabulary regarding salaries for teachers (Battle for Kids, 2010).

The impetus for teacher salary reform is mostly directed at changing the traditional salary schedule, particularly the lack of rewards attributed to teacher effectiveness (Patterson, 2011). According to Patterson (2011), a school district may select one or more of these factors to determine teacher efficacy and the weight of each to be factored into a corresponding salary.

Johnson and Papay (2009), Odden and Kelley (2002), and Podgursky and Springer (2007) grouped these four factors as summarized below:

1. Knowledge and skills: pay for undertaking professional development or acquiring skill-based credentials
2. Roles: pay for assuming special roles and responsibilities
3. Market factors: pay for teaching in hard to staff subjects or schools
4. Performance: pay for effective instructional practice and student achievement

These categories of teacher effectiveness are simply characteristics school districts wish to incentivize (Patterson, 2011). Though districts may provide additional compensation using one or more of these categories, the form in which the compensation appears could leave the most prevalent single salary schedule effectively untouched (Educational Research Strategies, 2012). According to Educational Research Strategies (2012), districts need to explore how the “salary component of a teacher compensation structure can integrate performance and contribution” (p. 2) for two reasons. First, teacher salaries represent the largest share of teacher compensation both from the perspective of the employer and the employee (Goldhaber, 2009).

Second, performance and contribution are primary issues for nearly all districts currently contemplating compensation reform (Goldhaber, 2009).

Potemski and Rowland (2011) noted the widespread and interchangeable use of these different labels causes confusion in policy for all stakeholders involved. Potemski and Rowland created a precise vocabulary to assist in the clear dissemination of knowledge to public stakeholders for avoiding “the pitfalls surrounding the language and terminology of past attempts” (2011, p. 2).

The research regarding strategic compensation is in its early stages of development (Patterson, 2011). The Center for American Progress published a report entitled “Do More, Add More, Earn More” in 2015 which examined a group of districts that experimented with teacher salary reform. The 10 districts were presented in the report because they were “among the first in the nation to redesign their teacher compensation systems” (Miles et al., 2015, p. 3). The 10 districts included: (a) Baltimore City, MD; (b) Denver, CO; (c) Douglas County, CO; (d) Harrison School District 2, CO; (e) Hillsborough County, FL; (f) Lawrence, MA; (g) New Haven, CT; (h) Pittsburgh, PA; (i) Putnam County, TN; and (j) Washington, DC. Although these 10 districts varied by geographic location (with three in Colorado), student enrollment, governance structure, and levels of student academic performance, all of their teacher salary reforms shared similar components (Miles et al., 2015).

Each of the first-mover districts considered the same key components during the teacher compensation redesign process (Miles et al., 2015). However, not all districts altered each component of the process, but each considered the following elements as part of their comprehensive approach to redesign compensation: (a) base salary; (b) teacher effectiveness; (c) speed of salary growth; (d) career pathway opportunities; (e) incentives for hard-to-staff

schools and positions; (f) bonuses, rewards, and recognition; and (g) the opt-in timeframe (Miles et al., 2015).

**Base salary.** In most districts, base salary constitutes up to 95% of teacher compensation (Educational Research Strategies, 2015). Base salary consists of starting salary and the permanent raises a teacher receives throughout his or her career. Most first-mover districts did not raise starting salaries (Miles et al., 2015). The other districts chose not to adjust the starting salary on the basis that such a move is costly and targets new teachers who have no historical proof of efficacy (Gordon, Kaine, & Staiger, 2006).

**Teacher effectiveness.** The single salary schedule relies solely on years on the job and level of education (Miller & Roza, 2011). Studies have now shown these indicators have little correlation to teacher effectiveness (Educational Research Strategies, 2015). The first-mover districts either eliminated or supplemented experience and education with other metrics that measures teacher performance. This, in turn, meant many of the districts restructured their teacher evaluation systems as part of designing the compensation system (Miles et al., 2015).

**Speed of salary growth.** Many first-mover districts incorporated systems that increased the speed of salary growth for high-performing teachers in an attempt to attract and retain more effective teachers (Miles et al., 2015). According to Miles et al. (2015), high-performing teachers could attain the highest salaries in a shorter amount of time. For example, in Harrison County, CO, teachers who showed high efficacy could achieve the top of the salary schedule in as few as 6 years (Miles & Belcher, 2012).

**Incentives for hard-to-staff schools.** First-mover districts used compensation to attract teachers to teach hard-to-staff subjects or in hard-to-staff schools (Miles et al., 2015). When districts set rigorous criteria to receive incentives, those incentives can be more sizeable, which

the research indicates is needed to recruit and retain the highest-performing teachers (Glazerman, Max, Bruch, Teh, & Protik, 2014).

Bonuses, rewards, and recognition. Some districts have moved away from bonuses as more research emerges questioning the effect of small bonuses based on teacher performance; however, many of the first-mover districts offered both individual and school-wide bonuses (Miles et al., 2015). These types of incentives have varying definitions in the first-mover districts but represent extra pay for teachers (Miles et al., 2015).

Recommendations from the research on the first-mover districts. While each of the 10 districts faced different constraints and made different choices in redesigning their compensation systems, the following are eight best practices for districts based on the case studies:

(a) Differentiate compensation based on roles and responsibilities; (b) Set starting salaries to meet market demand; (c) Align teacher compensation redesign with fair and proven teacher evaluation systems; (d) Shift pay away from years of experience and advanced-degree attainment; (e) Use compensation incentives to attract highly effective teachers to hard-to-staff schools, districts, and subjects; (f) Emphasize extra pay for effectiveness and career pathways instead of small bonuses; (g) Accelerate the timeline to earning the maximum salary where possible; and (h) Allow teachers to opt-in to new compensation systems within a set timeframe (Miles et al., 2015). The purpose of teacher compensation reform is to improve school districts' ability to attract, retain, and leverage a high-performing teaching force that aligns with a district's student-performance objectives and overall priorities (Heneman & Werner, 2006).

### **Conceptual Framework**

Although the literature suggested that school districts are far too complicated to identify a single solution for teacher compensation, it is understood that districts' leaders own a significant

share of responsibility for effectiveness in schools (Bolman & Deal, 2003). To that end, school superintendents play a critical role in the planning and implementation of school reform movements (Ireh & Bailey, 1999). In fact, the success of recent reform movements is highly dependent on the quality of the leadership provided by school superintendents which is second only to classroom instruction (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Leithwood & Levin, 2010). Reforms in American schools cannot be realized without school superintendents acting as catalysts (Walkder, 1994). According to Marzano and Waters (2006), there is “a substantial relationship between leadership and student achievement” (p. 3). The following is a brief review of two leadership frameworks: Bolman and Deal’s organizational theory of reframing organizations and Olivarez’s Ten Functions of School Districts.

### **The Bolman and Deal Framework**

Bolman and Deal (2015) presented four different perspectives, known as frames, to categorize and classify experiences in organizations: Structural, Human Resource, Political, and Symbolic. These four frames “have helped managers and leaders find clarity and meaning amid the confusion of organizational life” (p. 42).

**Structural frame.** The structural frame is the first of the four frames established by Bolman and Deal and may be described as follows:

The structural frame emphasizes rationality, efficiency, structure, and policies. Structural leaders value analysis of data, keep their eye on the bottom line, set clear directions, hold people accountable for results, and try to solve organizational problems with new policies and rules or through restructuring. (Bolman & Deal, 2015, p. 314)

This frame holds the assumptions that organizations exist to attain goals; organizational structures should be designed primarily to achieve the goals of the organization; specialization is

beneficial; coordination and control are essential; and, problems that arise can be solved by restructuring (Smith, 2012). Given these assumptions, the major role of the leader is “to design and implement a process or structure appropriate to the problem and the circumstances (Starling, 2008, p. 390).

**Human resource frame.** The human resources frame “focuses on the interaction between individual and organizational needs (Bolman & Deal, 2015). Human resource leaders value relationships and feelings and seek to lead through facilitation and empowerment” (Bolman & Deal, 2015, p. 315). This frame holds the assumptions that organizations exist to meet human needs; the individuals in the organizations need each other; when two parts are poor fits for one another, one or both are compromised; and, when two parts are good fits for one another, both benefit (Smith, 2012). Given these assumptions, the major role of the leader is to be responsive to support and empower individuals in the organization. Leaders in this frame must communicate and be aware of the climate (Bolman & Deal, 2015).

**Political frame.** The political frame “emphasizes conflict among different groups and interest for scarce resources (Bolman & Deal, 2015). Political leaders are advocates and negotiators who spend much of their time networking, creating coalitions, building a power base, and negotiating compromises” (Bolman & Deal, 2015, p. 315). This frame holds five assumptions that organizations are coalitions of diverse individuals and interest groups; there are enduring differences among these interest groups; the most important decisions involve the allocation of scarce resources; goals and decisions emerge from bargaining between competing stakeholders (Smith, 2012). Given these assumptions, the major role of the leader is to understand the political reality of organizations, where conflicts arise around limited resources (Bolman & Deal, 2015).

**Symbolic frame.** The symbolic frame which “sees a chaotic world in which meaning and predictability are socially constructed, and facts are interpretative rather than objective (Bolman & Deal, 2015). Symbolic leaders pay attention to myth, ritual, ceremony, stories, and other symbolic frames” (Bolman & Deal, 2015, p. 315). This frame holds the five assumptions that the meanings of actions are more important than the act itself; action may have different meanings because of individual perceptions; ambiguity and uncertainty always exists, and symbols are created because of this; effectiveness of an event is not always based on the actual productivity; culture is important (Smith, 2012). Given these assumptions, the major role of the leader is to create a vision and inspire by being very visible and energetic (Bolman & Deal, 2015). Leaders in the symbolic frame rely on traditions and values as the basis for building culture (Smith, 2012).

### **Ten Functions of School Districts**

Dynamic leadership by a superintendent integrates concepts from administrative, instructional and political leadership theories into real world applications (Purcell, 2017). Olivarez (2010, 2013) used these concepts to describe the ten functions of school districts: Governance Operations; Curriculum and Instruction; Elementary and Secondary School Campus Operations; Instructional Support Services; Human Resources; Operation Support; Accountability, Information Management, and Technology Services; External and Internal Communications; Facilities Planning and Plant Services; and Administrative, Finance, and Business Operations.

**Governance and Operations.** Governance and operations deal with the school board and their policies, regulations, and exhibits and their contributions to student achievement (Olivarez, 2013). Because the ultimate purpose is student achievement, this function goes beyond

navigating the board's internal operating procedures and requires establishing a shared vision and purpose (Olivarez, 2013). Governance and operations set the systems in place that lead to the success of students (Olivarez, 2013).

**Curriculum and Instruction.** Curriculum and Instruction function deals with teaching and learning (Olivarez, 2013). It is necessary for a school district to implement, evaluate, and revise educational programs, resources, and materials to ensure optimal teaching and learning to increase student achievement (Olivarez, 2013). To accomplish this task, it must function collaboratively with all levels of stakeholders (principals, teachers, and school/community members) to strive for excellence and equity (Olivarez, 2013). Regarding excellence, Curriculum and Instruction must be rigorous to not only meet established state requirements but also to prepare students to enter a challenging and competitive global economy (Olivarez, 2013). In terms of equity, an instructional program must be designed for all students to achieve and perform (Olivarez, 2013). Critical components of this function include curriculum alignment, curriculum resources, and assessments to measure student achievement (Olivarez, 2013).

**Elementary and Secondary School Campus Operations.** Elementary and secondary school campus operations are operations relative to the campus (Olivarez, 2013). Campus-based administrators are one of the major elements for this function as it pertains to providing instructional leadership and the management of daily activities on campus (Olivarez, 2013). With regard to instructional leadership, the campus administrators are responsible for setting standards and goals for teachers and students (Olivarez, 2013). At the campus level, they establish the policies and procedures, in accordance to local and state policy, to meet these standards. Some instructional components that are critical for this function include: supervising employees,

developing academic programs, monitoring student progress, and training teachers and other staff (Olivarez, 2013).

**Instructional Support Services.** Instructional support services include activities that support and enhance curriculum and instruction (Olivarez, 2013). Some components of this function include: planning and monitor the instructional program, designing and evaluating professional development programming based on the needs of administrators, teachers, and other instructional staff, and coaching and mentoring (Olivarez, 2013). Instructional support services programs are designed to provide coordinated support services that help students become and remain successful in school and include ancillary support in the areas of student discipline, special needs, and bilingual and immigrant learning (Olivarez, 2013).

**Human Resources.** The function of human resources function relates to recruitment, hiring, and retention of all district personnel (Olivarez, 2013). The school district must establish and implement personnel policies, develop and administer effective staff evaluations, and monitor staff certifications, requirements, and eligibilities (Olivarez, 2013). Human resources also has a vested interest in maintaining a highly qualified professional workforce (Olivarez, 2013).

**Operation Support.** The primary function of Operation Support is three pronged:

- Food Services
- Transportation Services
- Safety and Security Services

to provide a safe and nurturing educational environment for the students, staff, and stakeholders in all facilities in the school district (Olivarez, 2013).

**Accountability, Information Management and Technology.** Accountability, information management and technology is required to maintain information on students, staff, and district operations and programs (Olivarez, 2013). This includes not only establishing an information technology infrastructure, but also the implementation, support, and administration of the network (Olivarez, 2013).

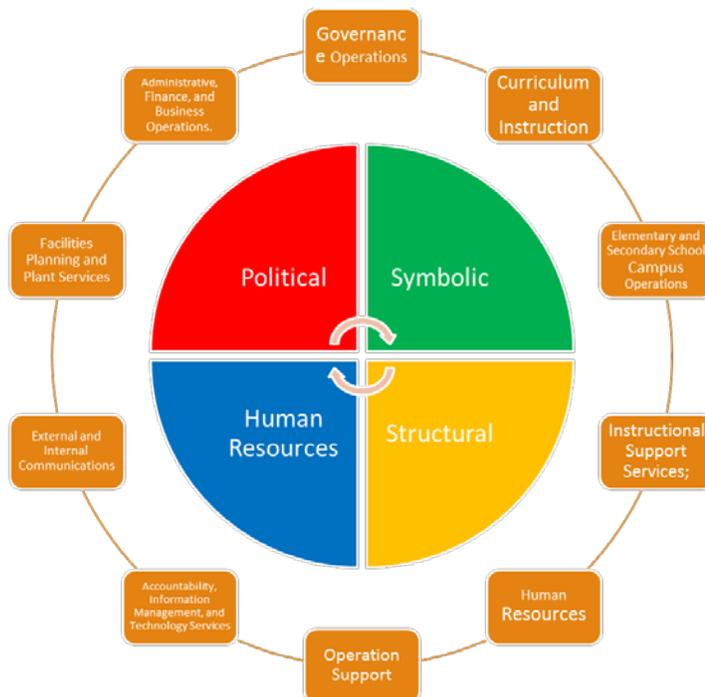
**External and Internal Communications.** The mission of external and internal communications is to provide information to educational stakeholders about the operations of the district, accurately and promptly (Olivarez, 2013). The communications department supports communication at each level of organizational structure, at the district, campus, departmental levels. Some responsibilities that fall under this function include: media relations, website development and maintenance, public relations, crisis communications, event management, and graphic design (Olivarez, 2013).

**Facilities Planning and Plant Services.** Facilities planning and plant services are concerned with the infrastructure of the school district (Olivarez, 2013). These services manage the physical plant operations and facilities planning and construction departments, as well as the implementation of construction and upgrades through bond measures (Olivarez, 2013).

**Administrative, Finance, and Business Operations.** Administrative, finance, and business operations are responsible for the complex job of managing the district's budget and investments (Olivarez, 2013). Administrative, finance, and business operations oversees a number of departments including accounting, accounts payable, budget, cash management, finance, payroll, purchasing, and special revenues (Olivarez, 2013).

## Synthesizing Bolman and Deal's Four Frames with Olivarez's Ten Functions

The conceptual framework represented the planning and implementation of a districtwide strategic teacher compensation plan, the Four Frames, the Ten Functions of School Districts, and the superintendent and appears in Figure 1. To form the conceptual framework, the works of Bolman and Deal (2008) and Olivarez (2013) were combined to represent the actions of the superintendent. While the ten functions provided an understanding of the considerations and actions performed within a school district, Bolman and Deal's four frames provided understanding of the reasons behind utilization of the functions throughout the planning and implementation process.



*Figure 1.* Diagram of the conceptual framework designed for this study.

Superintendents are tasked with understanding the factors influential to increasing student achievement. These factors guide decisions on the specific functions within the district. Also, these factors guide the implementation of effective programs. Bolman and Deal's (2015) four

frames might operate as “the why,” and the ten functions might operate as “the how” in superintendent behaviors.

### **Summary of the Chapter**

Special attention to the background of history of teacher pay reform, their connection to societal needs, real and perceived, and current research on various attempts at teacher reform in the last decade. The chapter concludes with literature regarding the role of the superintendent and leadership. Bolman and Deal’s (2015) Four Frames model and Olivarez’s (2013) Ten Functions of School Districts were synthesized to improve understanding of the role of the superintendent in planning and implementing a districtwide strategic teacher compensation plan in Texas. Chapter 3 provides an explication of the phenomenological method and the procedures for conducting this qualitative exploration of the perceptions held by superintendents implementing a districtwide strategic teacher compensation plan.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology and Procedures**

This chapter describes the design of the proposed study and the methodology behind it. The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the phenomenon of implementing districtwide salary reform by superintendents. Included within this chapter are purpose of the study, research design, setting and sample, data collection procedures, instrumentation, creditability, and data analysis.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the phenomenon of implementing districtwide teacher salary reform with superintendents of public schools. This study provided information to school administrators and researchers about the effects of superintendent leadership in implementing teacher pay reform in relation to intended district goals. This study examined superintendents' leadership perceptions and teacher compensation issues that affect school districts' operations in the state of Texas. The study's results might inform curriculum development within graduate programs preparing future superintendents.

### **Research Questions**

This qualitative and phenomenological study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What considerations are presented by superintendents in the development and implementation of a districtwide strategic teacher compensation plan?
2. What priorities are given by superintendents related to considerations in the development and implementation of a districtwide strategic teacher compensation plan?
3. What differences and commonalities are expressed by superintendents in comparable school districts regarding considerations and priorities?

The first question offered the opportunity to understand the superintendents' perceptions about necessary features of a districtwide strategic teacher compensation plan. The second question enabled the superintendents to discuss the goals that the strategic compensation plan is intended to accomplish as priorities. The third question discussed commonalities and differences between the superintendent considerations and priorities.

### **Research Design**

Qualitative research relies on interactive and humanistic methods that were ideally suited for the current study (Creswell, 2013). When using the phenomenological design, researchers provide in-depth reflections and descriptions of everyday experiences (Saldaña, 2013). The phenomenological model was the most appropriate method for an in-depth analysis of the perceptions had by superintendents and principals regarding the perceptions and experiences during a districtwide implementation of a strategic compensation plan. The phenomenological approach also provided the best avenue to develop and establish a rich description of the in-depth perceptions of leadership at various levels of the school district (Creswell, 2013).

### **Data Collection and Procedures**

The aim of qualitative research is to understand a specific phenomenon in its natural setting (Creswell, 2013). The phenomenological approach was used to investigate the sample of participants to whom the researcher had access for gaining a wide array of information about the specific subject of the research (Creswell, 2013). The participants were asked questions to explore their perceptions and experiences.

### **Instrumentation**

The semi-structured interviews were used for the purpose of ensuring the opportunity to ask follow up questions for clarity and for all of the participants to converse freely regarding

reflections about superintendent and principal perceptions and experiences with the implementation of a districtwide strategic teacher compensation plan. The focus of the interviews included asking participants about the content of the three research questions and seeking their answers to the research questions. The semi-structured interviews were acceptable for this phenomenological study because the researcher acted as an instrument of the study. The interviews were expected to last between 50 and 90 minutes, depending on the participants' depth of discussion and availability. The researcher respected the available time allotted by each participant. The questions asked in the semi-structured interviews were the following and appear in Appendix A:

#### Demographical

1. What is your role in the district?
2. How long have you been in your role in your career?
3. How long have you been in this role in this district?
4. How many years of your administrative career have taken place in Texas school districts?

#### District Historical Perspective

5. What departments and/or personnel were involved? For what were they responsible?
6. What do you think changed in the district that created the need for reform?
7. To What metrics do you attribute the needs and/or concerns?

#### Additional Prompts

- What was the state of teacher quality in the district?
- What was the state of teacher recruitment in the district?

- What was the state of teacher attrition in the district?
- What was the state of the workforce and their attributes in the district?

#### District Strategic Teacher Compensation Plan

8. As the instructional leader, what was your top priority?
9. What structures/features, if any, of the strategic teacher compensation plan affected:
  - a. Governance Operations; What was it meant to accomplish?
  - b. Curriculum and Instruction; What was it meant to accomplish?
  - c. Elementary and Secondary School Campus Operations; What was it meant to accomplish?
  - d. Instructional Support Services; What was it meant to accomplish?
  - e. Human Resources; What was it meant to accomplish?
  - f. Operation Support; What was it meant to accomplish?
  - g. Accountability, Information Management, and Technology Services; What was it meant to accomplish?
  - h. External and Internal Communications; What was it meant to accomplish?
  - i. Facilities Planning and Plant Services; What was it meant to accomplish?
  - j. Administrative, Finance, and Business Operations; What was it meant to accomplish?

#### Additional Prompts

- Were there political implications?
- Were there structural/organizational implications?

- Were there human resources implications?
- Were there symbolic implications?
- What would be the measures of success?
- What obstacles did you foresee, if any?
- How were those people responsible held accountable?

#### Leadership Reflections of Implementation

10. In your opinion, was the districtwide plan successful in meeting the initial goals?
11. What were the strongest features of the districts strategic teacher compensation plan?
12. What were the weakest features of the districts strategic teacher compensation plan?

#### Prompts:

After experiencing the implementation of the strategic compensation plan, what features would you have changed?

After experiencing the implementation of the strategic compensation plan, what features would you have added?

After experiencing the implementation of the strategic compensation plan, what features would you have removed?

Did the implementation experience change how you understand your role (as a principal or as a superintendent)?

Did the implementation experience change how you do your job (conduct your business)?

## **Participants**

The participants were superintendents and principals of Texas school districts that met the recommendations of Miles et al.'s (2015) study of a first mover school district and have implemented a districtwide strategic teacher compensation plan. The interviews enabled participants to have the opportunity to share their reflections according to their specific perspectives and experience in their respective district's implementation.

The interviews lasted approximately 50 to 90 minutes each, depending on the depth of information shared between the participant and the researcher. All participants' identities were masked by use of pseudonyms in order to protect their identities and to maintain confidentiality. Interviews were recorded to facilitate transcription and analysis of the interview data.

## **Data Analysis**

Qualitative data analysis allows for making sense out of data to communicate it to others (Creswell, 2013). Researchers ask questions to comprehend data implications and significance. The data analysis process involves understanding the concepts and themes that interviewees frequently mentioned from the emic perspective, rather than the researcher's etic perspective (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

In order to analyze the data from the individual interviews, special attention was given to the perspective of the person who is being interviewed. The analysis of the transcribed interview data began with open coding to facilitate theme development (Saldaña, 2013). Each interview was reviewed in conjunction with the other interviews to ensure information and key findings were not missed in the process. The interviews produced data for developing themes related to the implementation of a districtwide strategic teacher compensation plan.

## **Summary**

This chapter provided an outline of research methodology used in this phenomenological study. The overall goal of the research was to answer the research questions and convey the experiences of the superintendents in implementing districtwide teacher salary reform. The participants' semi-structured interviews were used to answer the study's three research questions, and data analysis yielded in-depth theme development. Chapter 4 displays these findings.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the phenomenon of current and former superintendents of “first mover” public schools in Texas who have implemented a districtwide strategic teacher compensation plan. These interviews were done over multiple days. The researcher asked probing questions and multiple follow up questions to gather meaningful responses that accurately provide the detail needed for the comprehensive nature of this phenomenological study. The data were used to answer the study’s three research questions based on the theoretical framework founded on Olivarez’s (2013) Ten Functions of School Districts and Bolman and Deal’s (2015) Four Frames of leadership. In this chapter, the participants’ characteristics as well as the strategic compensation plans they implemented appear alongside their experiences. The findings are presented by research question.

### **The Participants**

The criteria for participating in the study targeted three (3) current and former superintendents in districts that implemented a districtwide strategic teacher compensation plan in their school districts. The participating superintendents were selected geographically, located within the geographical boundary in the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex (DFW). The participants’ school districts were required to meet the recommendations of Miles et al.’s 2015 study of first mover school districts. These recommendations are that the strategic compensation plan:

- affects base salary,
- measures teacher effectiveness,
- addresses speed of salary growth,
- establishes career pathway opportunities,
- considers incentives for hard-to-staff schools and positions,

- considers bonuses, rewards, and recognition, and
- considers the opt-in timeframe.

Approximately 10 public school districts were identified from a document review of public school districts in DFW. Three superintendents of the targeted school districts were invited. One of the superintendents who was invited for an interview chose not to participate. From the initial invitation, the remaining superintendents were invited at a first-come-first-serve basis. The three superintendents who participated in the study consisted of one male and two females. The three superintendents led their respective school districts during the planning and implementation of a districtwide strategic compensation plan. Two of the participants were superintendents of traditional ISD's and one participant was the superintendent of a public charter school.

School District 1 implemented a value-added teacher compensation model. At implementation, the school district is considered large (serving 25,000 to 99,000 students) in a minority, urban, high-poverty setting in DFW. The superintendent was present for the implementation of the strategic teacher compensation plan through the second year of its implementation.

The district's compensation plan met the recommendations of "first mover" school districts. The district's compensation plan would base teacher salary on teacher effectiveness which would be based on a value-added metric. By design, high needs campuses were incentivized and allowed teachers the ability to opt-in to the plan. Teachers would be able to attain higher salaries in a faster timeline than the traditional teacher salary structure. Built in to the district compensation plan, teachers were provided an expanded career pathway.

School District 2 implemented a comprehensive districtwide strategic compensation plan. At implementation, the school district is considered largest (serving over 100,000 students) in a minority, urban, high-poverty setting in DFW. The superintendent was present for the implementation of the strategic compensation plan through the second year of implementation.

The district's compensation plan met the recommendations of "first mover" school districts. The district's compensation plan would base teacher salary on teacher performance as measured by student achievement (absolute and value-added) and student surveys. By the district strategic plan design, retention of effective teachers would be incentivized and ineffective teachers would be disincentivized. The district considered an opt-in structure; however, instituted a condition that no teacher would be paid less than their baseline salaries entering the first year of implementation. Teachers would be able to attain higher salaries in a faster timeline than the traditional teacher salary structure. Built in to the district compensation plan, teachers were provided an expanded career pathway.

School District 3 implemented a labor-market merit system for teacher compensation. At implementation, the school district is considered midsized (serving 2,500 to 5,000 students) in a minority, urban, high-poverty setting in DFW. The superintendent was present for the implementation of a holistic teacher compensation reform plan currently in its fifth year.

The district's compensation plan met the recommendations of "first mover" school districts. The district's compensation plan was based teacher salary on teacher performance as measured by an array of metrics, including student achievement, professional development, community service, and attendance. By design, highly qualified teachers were incentivized to remain in the district by maintaining a competitive salary with respect to market value. The district considered an opt-in structure, allowing teachers the ability to voluntarily undergo

review. Teachers could attain higher salaries in a faster timeline than the traditional teacher salary structure. Built in to the district compensation plan, teachers had an expanded career pathway. Table 1 summarizes each superintendent’s compensation plan.

Table 1

*Summary of Participating School Districts and Strategic Compensation Plans*

Superintendent	Compensation System	Title I	Urban	Affects Base Salary	Measures Teacher Effectiveness	Addresses speed of Salary Growth	Establishes Career Pathway Opportunities	Considers bonuses for Hard-to-Satff Schools	Considers Bonus, Rewards, and Recognition	Considers the Opt-In Timeline
01	Value-added	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
02	Pay for Performance	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
03	Labor Market	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

**Presentation of the Data**

The responses to the interview questions for this research question varied by participant. Each participant presented information based on the specific school district’s situation. Each of the three experiences through planning and implementation of a districtwide strategic teacher compensation plan was described uniquely by the participant, and each school district implemented a districtwide strategic compensation plan under the three superintendents. As part of preparing to answer the research questions concerning implementation of a comprehensive compensation system, the researcher used NVivo to code the data.

## **Research Question 1**

This question asked the following: What considerations are presented by superintendents in the development and implementation of a districtwide strategic teacher compensation plan? The interview questions asked the participants to describe their education and superintendent career histories, organizational structure and climate, and the considerations and needs of the district that influenced their decision to implement a districtwide strategic compensation plan. The interview questions asked the participants to recall the district landscape with respect to each of the Ten Functions of School Districts as well as the Four Frames in which they viewed the situation.

In compilation of the considerations, the results utilize both a review of district documents and the three responses to the interview questions from the superintendents. The data are first presented within each superintendent.

**Superintendent 01.** In a review of the documents which included school board minutes, district published communication, and human resources manuals, the strategic compensation program initiated by Superintendent 01 was designed to reward teachers for student academic growth, using a value-added approach. The district intended to use statistical methods to measure the impact schools and teachers have on students' academic progress rates from year to year. As noted during the presentation of the compensation plan to the school board, the goals included the following:

- Higher effective teacher and principal retention rates
- Higher percentages of teachers who are deemed highly effective
- More targeted professional development offerings based on the individual, campus, and program needs as teachers and administrators have identified them, and

- Higher teacher and principal employee satisfaction scores regarding levels of support; opportunities to collaborate; and high-quality, relevant professional development.

The superintendent’s vision for the strategic compensation plan was to ensure that “every classroom had a highly effective teacher and every school had a highly effective leader.”

In addition to a document review, the one-on-one interview conducted allowed the participant to discuss the experience of planning and implementing the strategic compensation plan, specifically with regards to the considerations through the process. After coding the 178 considerations elicited from the interview, Table 2 shows the distribution of the ten functions provided by Superintendent 01.

Table 2

*Distribution of Superintendent 01 Considerations by Function*

Superintendent 01	% Data Within Person
HR	22.5
C&I	17.4
COMM	14.0
CAMP	10.7
TECH	9.6
FIN	8.4
SUPP	5.6
OPP SUPP	4.5
FAC	3.9
GOV	3.4

Of the considerations within the ten functions of schools, the top three functions were Human Resources, Curriculum and Instruction, and School Leadership. The references to these

top functions are addressed as part of answering this research question. In each function's section, both the data and the potential adjustments are provided.

***Human Resources.*** Superintendent 01 communicated in her interview that she had several considerations in the area human resources. These considerations related to teacher recruitment and teacher retention.

In discussing teacher recruitment practices for her district, she dismissed the general concept of teacher shortages. She stated:

Big systems don't generally have teacher recruitment issues. You have so many vacancies, and the big systems always tend to pay you better, so we never really had a problem filling the positions.

Superintendent 01 explained that the consideration should be specifically recruiting "quality teachers" and "getting the right teachers in the right seats." For the local context of her district, she said the term "quality" was ambiguous. She believed that quality teachers are either:

- Created within the district or
- Recruited into the district.

With respect to recruiting into the district, the district must consider how recruiting efforts and human resources systems are "finding master teachers who, no matter what tools or curriculum you give them, know how to teach. And, know how to teach their content." She explained that the recruitment process needs to know what constitutes a master teacher and strategically target them. She explained:

You can have good instincts in terms of pedagogy, but not know your content. And you can know your content and not have any idea how to teach it. So, I think it cuts both

ways, we only focused on the one. You're smart in math, but you don't know how to teach math.

With respect to building district capacity of master teachers internally, she discounted the factors of a changing workforce as described in the research. She stated, “[New teachers] did [intend to make teaching a career], but the statistics were still the same, that we lost 50% within the first five years. I don't think that statistic has changed much [now].” She explained that “a lot of teachers come in, they have no idea what they're walking into. They're not prepared to work.” This causes a problems of teacher retention, because new teachers are expected to need support from the district, because she believed new teachers come into the profession unprepared. She reiterated that the human resources officer needs to know what constitutes a master teacher and provide appropriate teacher professional development and new teacher supports.

Another consideration brought forth from the interview was the distribution of quality teachers. Superintendent 01 explained that there has always been a “standard practice” in handling low performing schools and poor teacher quality. She said, “What happens when a school is low performing? They remove the administrators. They remove the teachers.” But she noted the need to answer:

- How do you know once you remove the teachers that you are not getting the same kinds of teachers back in?
- How do you get master teachers to choose these harder-to-staff schools?

Superintendent 01’s district lacked any method to incentivize “good teachers and administrators to move to a low performing school.” The superintendent noted, “There were silos of quality teachers in the district.” She emphasized:

I think that is the number one reason to do [teacher pay reform] to me. It's not the chaos, the insanity of dumping out a school, bringing in a whole new school. We have no way of knowing, when we dumped a school out, that we aren't getting the same stuff back in.

Superintendent 01 cautioned that a school district must “not only talk about student's performance, but it also implies collaboration and climate.” She explained that money alone would not be an incentive. She shared that climate and culture is a bigger consideration than the amount of money rewarded. She said:

It's not worth it. Not worth it you have to create a whole culture for them to thrive in a feel good about. If they're already in that kind of culture, \$10,000 is not going to make my life ... What I have to put in, to those kinds of schools. I know for at fact, [the teachers] didn't work any harder because of the money. They would have worked just as hard in the school they had come from for far less money. In fact, [one teacher] was in our toughest high school. Those schools, specifically high schools, that are in turn-around mode are ... They take such a toll on people that most people can't handle it more than 2 or 3 years, because it never gets less difficult or takes less of you. So, that guy left; he had a \$20,000 salary increase, and he left. Maybe it was 22, something like that. It was significant. He went to medical school. Thought that was easier.

Because of that effect, Superintendent 01 prioritized providing teachers with “the opportunity to work with a group of people who shared your same values and philosophy of collaboration, of teamwork.” Superintendent 01 added:

That was very much at the center of the conversations because we didn't want to create competition. That was my motto, “Teaching is a team sport.” We did not want to destroy that culture but, just the opposite, encourage that culture.

In that way, Superintendent 01 clarified that her vision for teacher compensation is non-competitive.

***Curriculum and Instruction.*** Superintendent 01 stated that upon her arrival in the district, two years prior to implementing the strategic compensation plan, “I don't recall there being any curriculum frameworks of any kind [at the beginning of the planning].” She described curriculum and instruction as “pretty bereft.” A consideration ought to be whether the district “had the tools before we asked people to do the job.” According to her, the district was “just pretty much a textbook driven district.” Superintendent 01 recalled that one of the first things she did was to “create curriculum documents like scope and sequence and teaching expectations.” Those curricular supports were absent when she entered the district. She further explained:

People felt pretty good about themselves. They were not evaluated regularly and when they were, they would be told ‘good job’ and that was that. Do you know the definition of insanity? Do the same thing and expect different results. But there wasn’t a lot of attention to results to know what a ‘good job’ looked like in the classroom. So, there was no accountability and there were no systems.

Superintendent 01 believed that teachers had no common understanding of what constituted quality teaching, as there were no set metrics or procedures in reviewing data.

Teachers needed to have guidelines like curriculum expectations in order to have a standard to meet. Once she generated these documents, she then aimed at providing “systems to provide feedback.” She noted the lack of a “strategic plan. There were no measurable outcomes. So, we did performance management systems and each division had to meet their goals and outcomes and expectations.”

Once these systems were set in place, the superintendent said, “You need to consider providing supports if you want it to happen.” She provided the following example:

We had literacy coaches and math coaches. But then we also created ... It was a whole infrastructure of support. So, if we put literacy teachers in every elementary school, master teachers of reading. Then, how do we organize and support them from the system level. What we then had at the Central Office level, we had eight additional teacher positions. Still, another step out of the classroom, two steps away. They, then, were assigned a certain number of schools to work with the reading teachers in those schools. Superintendent 01 thought it was the districts function to support the initiatives and actions it valued. These considerations, according to Superintendent 01, just made “common sense” and were aligned with her philosophy of “anytime that [she] did something to support the schools, it started with a lot of thought and talk and planning.”

***Elementary and Secondary School Campus Operations.*** Superintendent 01 said another consideration is school leadership because “teachers will come because they want to work in a healthy climate of collaboration and teamwork” and that “the selection of principal is critical to the success of any program.” She illustrated that campus leadership has authority as follows:

Well, at that point, you have to turn it over to the leadership. And give them some freedom and flexibility. You don’t want to dictate everything. We didn’t even dictate the curriculum. We said, “Here’s the standards. Here’s some resources. Here’s some strategies.” But, you didn’t have to be on this page, in this book, on this day. We had pacing guides which, especially in systems and schools because they’re behind, you need those. Otherwise, they get remediated to death and all they do then is just fall farther behind.

Because of the importance of campus leadership, Superintendent 01 restructured the organizational chart to place principals under her. She thought it was important to do this reorganization because before this point, the board had played the role of placing principals in schools “that needed to change.” In describing the new organizational system, she explained:

What I did was on the [organizational chart], the principals reported to the Chief of School Leadership or the Deputy over School Leadership. But there was a broken line from the principals directly to me. And that was always there. That message was: “these are your front lines. This is what we’re all about. This is who we serve.

Superintendent 01 believed the principals always needed to have “direct access to [her],” and the lines of communication needed to be unencumbered. To illustrate the superintendent and principal relationship, she stated:

We had the key principals come to [the superintendent’s] house quite a bit. They would come over for dinner. I remember that. I would have them come over for dinner. We had special meetings, but we met with all the principals regularly anyway.

She attributed the attention to principals as a consideration when she commented, “If the principals are successful, the teachers will be successful. If the teachers are successful, the kids will be successful, right?”

**Superintendent 02.** In a review of the documents which included board minutes, district published communication, and human resources manuals, the strategic compensation program initiated by Superintendent 02 replaced the previous tenure-based compensation system with an integrated system that defines, supports, and rewards teacher excellence. Teachers were evaluated each year based on teacher performance, student achievement, and student experience surveys. Effective teachers were provided the opportunity to significantly increase their salaries

in a shorter period of time compared to a traditional tenure-based compensation system. As noted during the presentation of the compensation plan to the school board, the goals included the following:

- Create a more equitable system of paying teachers
- Attract and Retain high performing teachers
- Provide specific supports for lower-performing teachers or encouraging them to seek other careers
- Improve student academic achievement

Superintendent 02's vision for the strategic compensation plan was to grow and develop all teachers "into the premier teaching force in the country." The superintendent simplified how "to identify the effectiveness of teachers, to support them with coaching and feedback as they improve their craft, and to compensate them fairly for guiding students to academic success."

In addition to a document review, the one-on-one interview conducted allowed Superintendent 02 to discuss the experience of implementing the strategic compensation plan, specifically with regards to the considerations they took through the process. After coding the 117 considerations elicited from this interview, Table 3 depicts distribution within Superintendent 02's data:

Table 3

*Distribution of Superintendent 02 Considerations by Function*

Superintendent 02	% Data Within Person
HR	20.3
TECH	16.1
FIN	14.4
GOV	12.7
C&I	9.3
COMM	8.5
CAMP	7.6
SUPP	6.8
FAC	2.5
OPP SUPP	1.7

Of the considerations within the Ten Functions of School Districts, the top three functions were Human Resources, Accountability and Information Systems, and Finance and Business Operations respectively. The references to these top functions are addressed as part of answering this research question. In each function’s section, both the data and the potential adjustments are provided.

***Human Resources.*** Superintendent 02 communicated in his interview that he had several considerations in the area human resources. These considerations related to teacher recruitment, teacher retention, and teacher attrition.

In discussing teacher recruitment practices for his district, he also dismissed the general concept of teacher shortages. He stated:

In large urban areas, there really is no teacher shortage. It's a shortage of quality. I mean, in my district, prior to my living there, we had 880 teacher vacancies. People were saying

we had a shortage of teachers. Well, we didn't have a shortage of teachers. We just didn't have a good process for getting quality teachers in.

Recruiting quality teachers in districts, in his experience, was impeded when you base a teacher salary on years of experience and professional credit hours. He stated:

So let's take [a former District I have worked in] for example, which I think is innovative. It's a good school district and it has [a similar plan], which is a pay for performance. However, 80% of it is based on years of experience and professional credit hours. So I'm not sure if that's a true pay for performance system when overall the majority of your salary is based on your years of experience. Even the districts that have a pay for performance or merit-based system, much of it is from a salary schedule.

He elaborated that this is an important consideration for him in planning a districtwide strategic teacher compensation plan. He encouraged school districts to abandoning the traditional compensation system, and even merit-based pay systems that incorporate these metrics. These systems make it difficult to recruit and retain quality teachers in two ways:

- There is no incentive to be a master teacher
- Master teachers have to leave the classroom to receive any significant pay raise

He noted that in the traditional salary schedule “all teachers were treated about the same whether they were good, bad, or indifferent.” In such a climate, he believed that you disincentivize teachers to work at mastering their teaching craft, because there was no extrinsic benefit. In addition, the teachers that do intrinsically work for teaching excellence have no incentive to stay in the classroom. He said:

Most of the persistent principal complaints [was] that they lose good teachers because there is little incentive to stay in the classroom. Promoting to administrators [was] the

only option for many of them. I don't know if most. I think many of them. So, teachers become assistant principals and assistants become principals and usually there are stronger teachers who either go that route, or they go to the house.

Another consideration stated by Superintendent 02 is the impact of low performing teachers have on the district. When viewing teacher attrition, a district needs to consider not just recruiting high quality teachers, but also strategic attrition of low performing teachers.

Superintendent 02 stated:

My sense was that the not-so-strong teachers were left to continue to teach, and yes, there were some people that were non-renewed, but not many. The percentage is very low and all teachers were treated about the same whether they were good, bad, or indifferent.

He emphasized that a district needs to address teacher attrition of low performing teachers.

Superintendent 02 accounted for this in his plan, and confirmed:

We told them several things, which we knew were going to happen because of my experience. Number one, your lowest performing teachers are going to leave the system. If they're not evaluated out, they will self-select out. So, you will retain higher performing teachers at a lot higher numbers. Then, you will move lower performing teachers at higher than usual [rates]. That's going to work.

***Accountability, Information Systems, and Technology.*** Superintendent 02 observed the method in which teachers are evaluated throughout the year is an important consideration.

Concerning teacher evaluation practices in his district, he noted:

[S]ome teachers had not been evaluated for six years. I mean, I found that out because I asked some tough questions about it. 'Okay, [how do you know teacher quality]. Well, what does the evaluation say?' Well, that teacher hadn't been evaluated for six years.

Okay, so that gives you an idea. Not everybody of course, but [a good portion of teachers] and because there was not a lot of focus on it because the evaluations don't mean anything and almost everybody's proficient.

Teacher evaluations, according to Superintendent 02, was “for compliance reasons” and principals would “do the one or two that need to be done in that classroom.” The result is “results that don’t go anywhere” and “most principals not [knowing] what was going on in the classroom or how teachers were teaching.” For this reason, he developed a teacher evaluation system that held teachers and principals accountable. According to Superintendent 02, “no system can operate efficiently if what it values is disconnected from how it compensates people.” He continues by saying, “the system, doesn't matter whether it's a school system, a car business, a hospital. If what you value isn't aligned with how you compensate people, you don't get maximum effective efforts.” As part of the new teacher evaluation system, teachers were evaluated by metrics categorized as student achievement (performance and progress), teacher performance (conduct including planning and instructional practices), and student surveys. The superintendent stated that he wanted to create a culture that relies “on data or at least understands how to use data because we're about to use data with teachers.” Lastly, the system has to be designed to support the teachers throughout the year. This is an important consideration to Superintendent 02 because:

If you have accountability without support, you have a climate of fear because you still have to have accountability. But the only way to avoid a climate of fear is to have support. So every executive director was trained and had a coach and we used that word specifically and that's what we did.

***Finance and Business Operations.*** Superintendent 02 worked collaboratively with his financial department as the strategic teacher compensation plan was designed. According to the superintendent, he was “putting together the largest merit-based salary system the country has ever seen. 10,000 teachers without a salary schedule, not incentive pay, not a bonus. Not incremental stipends and stuff like that, which other districts offered.” In order to accomplish a salary reform of that magnitude, he knew he would need to consider sustainability. He recalled that he worked with the chief financial officer on sustainability models. Eventually, he said that targeted distributions would allow the district to monitor and adjust district personnel budgets. He explained:

So, it can work, but you have to stick with the target distribution. So, here's why it works. If [under a traditional salary scale], the amount of money we paid out in salaries, somewhere around 450 million dollars is [an area under a line as a function of years and proficiency] .. we get rid of the time because it's no longer based on the time, and this person's making this much money and yeah, and you line them up and you take 45 million dollars and you paid them all a salary, relatively low, it would equal the area under this curve. So, if this was the average salary right? This is the average salary. You're paying these people this much more, because they're stronger and the people at the lower end of proficiency, yeah, this is proficiency. That's how you set up a target distribution.

Another consideration for sustainability of the teacher compensation plan is strategic attrition. The plan was not only designed to ensure “the proficient teachers stayed,” but also to ensure “the less proficient teachers have exited.”

**Superintendent 03.** In a review of the documents which included board minutes, district published communication, and human resources manuals, the strategic compensation program initiated by Superintendent 03 is designed to maintain and enhance a working environment that retains high quality employees. The district takes into account labor market competition annually and adjust salary based on teacher effectiveness in a holistic methodology. As noted on district generated program overview presentation, the goals included the following:

- Provide a competitive total compensation package that attracts and retains high quality employees
- Reward teacher for performance, attendance, professional development, expertise, and more
- Improve student academic achievement

The superintendent’s vision for the strategic compensation plan was to attract and retain “the best” people. She believed that people were the most important asset of the school district, and districts should reward them for accountability results, community involvement, teacher attendance and other criteria that can positively impact student success.

In addition to a document review, the one-on-one interview conducted allowed the participant to discuss the experience of implementing the strategic compensation plan, specifically with regards to the considerations she took through the process. After coding the 125 codes elicited from the interview, Table 4 depicts the distribution from Superintendent 03:

Table 4

*Distribution of Superintendent 03 Considerations by Function*

Superintendent 03	% Data Within Person
HR	20.8
C&I	12.8
COMM	7.2
CAMP	14.4
TECH	16.0
FIN	15.2
SUPP	4.8
OPP SUPP	0.8
FAC	0.8
GOV	7.2

Of the considerations within the Ten Functions of School Districts, the top three functions were Human Resources, Accountability and Information Systems, and Finance and Business Operations respectively. The references to these top functions are addressed as part of answering this research question. In each function’s section, both the data and the potential adjustments are provided.

***Human Resources.*** Superintendent 03 communicated in her interview that she had several considerations in the area human resources. These considerations related to teacher recruitment, teacher retention, and teacher attrition.

Superintendent 03 believed that the teacher compensation system within a district needs to be designed around quality teaching and symbolic of what the district values and rewards. She cited labor market realities and believe school districts need to consider the market outside the traditional education system as a reality among its employees. She explained that for the

students in her district, quality teachers are an absolute requirement and expectation.

Superintendent 03 explained:

My district has the needs of a high-impact, high needs population instruction that's typical of any urban, at-risk school system. My teachers, specifically regarding teachers, what we really need the best is high-energy, skilled practice. Teachers who can teach with rigor, that have multiple areas of certifications and endorsements, specifically in the areas of ESL and gifted and talented.

Like the other superintendents, she also reiterated the district has been able to find teachers to fill vacancies; however, recruiting “the best candidate in the new teacher employment pool” and “retaining teachers the district has deemed high quality and have proven so from their student data and personal contributions” is not supported by a traditional teacher salary system. She reasons this by stating:

As a school, we're looking at people that are highly skilled and successful at teaching students, that are being measured by the state and the nation on their academic growth. So, a step-based pay system for teachers would make as much sense as paying all attorneys the same or all doctors the same. Regardless of their success rate.

She stresses that you have to have “a competitive compensation plan in order to get the best candidates. And we're competing with really large school districts all around us and other [public] schools. The real fact is we are not just competing with other school districts. We are competing against other markets.” The superintendent continues:

I think that a part of it, too, is the factor that you have to consider that a lot of people go into teaching, and they only stay three years. Just because they are paid less. And that's just overall the resignation.

She emphasized that these resignations are not just to other district or other positions outside the classroom. In designing her strategic compensation plan, she intended to:

- Be more able to recruit the best master teachers based on their merit
- Provide competitive salary advancements in the classroom
- Communicate and promote district values

She stated that the traditional salary schedule is unable to support these goals. It fails at aligning compensation with what the district values. She exposed the misalignment by saying:

Step-based pay system is an example of a bureaucratic system. There's not a business model that puts out high outcomes or measured outcomes in the business world where people are paid just based on their years of service if they're looking for measured progress. Let's say if you work as a doctor. Doctors aren't paid the same amount of money regardless of what level of skillset they have. They are paid based on how successful that they are at their skillset and is successful in curing.

She also noted the importance of defining a quality teachers in a “holistic approach.” She explained:

I think [a strategic compensation plan] allows you to look at the person's moral, and in their moral grip, their strength. I think it also helps you look at loyalty. The big thing about it is that we all know longevity is a good thing, but as this process goes I think a side-effect is that as we go through the process of looking at teachers holistically that it also helps us develop those teachers where their strengths are, and they're not just pigeon-holed in an area where they may not be as successful in other areas.

The superintendent also advises districts who use a traditional salary schedule to consider the cost of training and preparing teachers. She stated that “it costs about \$30,000 to train and

prepare a new teacher. So, when you lose a classroom teacher for any reason, you lose that investment.” A traditional salary schedule, as she explains, can “make the situation worse because it drives great teachers out of the classroom.” She explained:

The other thing that this happens is that because of our structure it allows us to maintain people and positions that they enjoy. And they don't go into another position just because the compensation might be better. When they are able to stay in the position that they are and be compensated, despite the fact that, you know, traditionally you might look at somebody and say they don't fit in that, they're being overpaid for what they do. Well you might be paying them because they're the best at what they do. So, I don't consider it as over payment. I consider keeping return on your investment.

***Accountability, Information Systems, and Technology.*** Because Superintendent 03 believed a pay system based on years of experience is flawed, she spoke in depth about the metrics that she holds teachers accountable for in her district. She stated:

Well just like we look at the holistic success of the whole child, we look at the success of the whole teacher. There are things that are beyond the control of the teacher and things that are in immediate control of the teacher. An example is teacher attendance. We look to see if teachers are actually. They sign a contract for so many days, do they actually fulfill every single one of those days? Especially are they at work on time? Do they complete and follow the district policy? Are they advancing their own education? Are they taking professional development? Are they adding on certifications? Are they becoming specialist in any particular area? The other thing is extracurricular activities, duties that they perform for the community to enrich the school environment.

She added that “last, of course, and important is their student achievement.” She shared that a district should take great consideration when they define student achievement by stating:

And when we have a teacher come in we have measures in place that measure this child's skill set at the beginning of the year and that child's skill set at the end of the year. So we're not only measuring that teacher's success rate against the state test, but we're measuring that teacher's success rate during their calendar year while they are responsible for that child's learning.

She says the district administers national examinations to measure growth within a school year, in addition to the traditional state administered assessments. This is done as early as kindergarten and as late as the junior year of high school.

The district does use the T-TESS in order to evaluate teacher performance; however, on the topic, she said, “Teacher evaluations never gave the whole picture. We developed a rubric and asked teachers to advocate for themselves in these areas. We had our data, but they were able to bring in their own.” She allowed teachers to present the data from their perspectives, because:

I think the important part of the district is that you use more than one set of data to make your evaluation. I think that you need to make it as non-subjective as you can. And I think that you need to allow that employee their responsibility, or the opportunity, not responsibility, strike responsibility, but that employee the opportunity to come and to advocate for themselves and to share what they're proud of.

***Finance and Business Operations.*** Superintendent 03 noted that her district is financially responsible. She attributed that partly to a financial consideration of “what do we do with teachers that we don't want to retain.” She emphasized the following:

I think that that's just as important is that when you're talking about your financial handlings of teachers that are compensated well you've got to be just as cognizant and just as aware of the teachers that are not performing.

She claimed that was an important consideration as part of being financially responsible:

You have to cut the fat, and you have to make sure that you're not paying somebody that's not doing the job. And when you realize somebody's not doing the job in that holistic area that it's just as hard to get rid of that person. But you have to do that in order [to] acknowledge and compensate the people that are doing the job. In other words, Strategic attrition is just as important as strategic recruitment. You will never be able to afford teacher merit pay without identifying and removing teacher dead weight.

**Summary of findings for Research Question 1.** Research Question 1 showed that each superintendent had considerations which fell within each of Olivarez's ten functions. The top considerations presented by the superintendents in the development and implementation of a districtwide strategic teacher compensation plan were categorized in the following functions: (a) Human Resources, (b) Accountability, Information Systems, and Technology, (c) Finance and Business Operations, (d) Curriculum and Instruction, and (e) Elementary and Secondary Campus Operations.

The superintendents identified considerations at varying levels in relation to the ten functions; however, for all three superintendents, the function of Human Resources was the dominant function cited for considerations in planning and implementing a districtwide strategic compensation plan. In this function, the summary of considerations from the superintendents were:

1. Recruiting needs to address attracting master teachers

2. Retention needs to account that new teachers need strong instructional support
3. Retention needs to incentivize staying in the classroom
4. Attrition needs to be strategic
5. The qualities of effective teachers need to be expanded
6. Districts must be competitive with the labor market to recruit and retain the best, and
7. Teacher training and preparation is a monetary investment.

For Superintendent 02 and Superintendent 03, the two next functions that received the most discussion were the function of Accountability, Information Systems, and Technology and the function of Finance and Business Operations. In Accountability, Information Systems, and Technology, the summary of considerations from the superintendents were:

1. District needs a teacher evaluation model that is aligned to what the district values
2. Values need to aligned with metrics that can be measured
3. There needs to be built-in systems of support for each metric

In Finance and Business Operations, the summary of considerations from the superintendents were:

1. Sustainability is a function of planning.
2. Districts can embed systems/controls to mitigate unexpected consequences of teacher merit-based pay rewards such as target distribution
3. Districts cannot reward high performing teachers if they carry the financial burden of low performing teachers

For Superintendent 03, the two next functions that received the most discussion were the function of Curriculum and Instruction and the function of Elementary and Secondary Campus Operations. In Curriculum and Instruction, the consideration from the superintendent is district

needs to provide the tools teachers need to do the job: viable curriculum, system to accurately assess teacher quality, and provide curriculum support staff. In Elementary and Secondary Campus Operations, the considerations from the superintendent included needing to recognize the link between principals and school success and that principals need to have a degree of freedom and flexibility.

### **Research Question 2**

This research question asked the following: What priorities are given by superintendents related to considerations in the development and implementation of a districtwide strategic teacher compensation plan? The three superintendents' responses to the interview questions repeatedly implicated Bolman and Deal's Leadership Frameworks throughout the planning and implementation of their strategic compensation plans. Each of the four frames affected priorities, and the 187 responses appear in Figure 2.

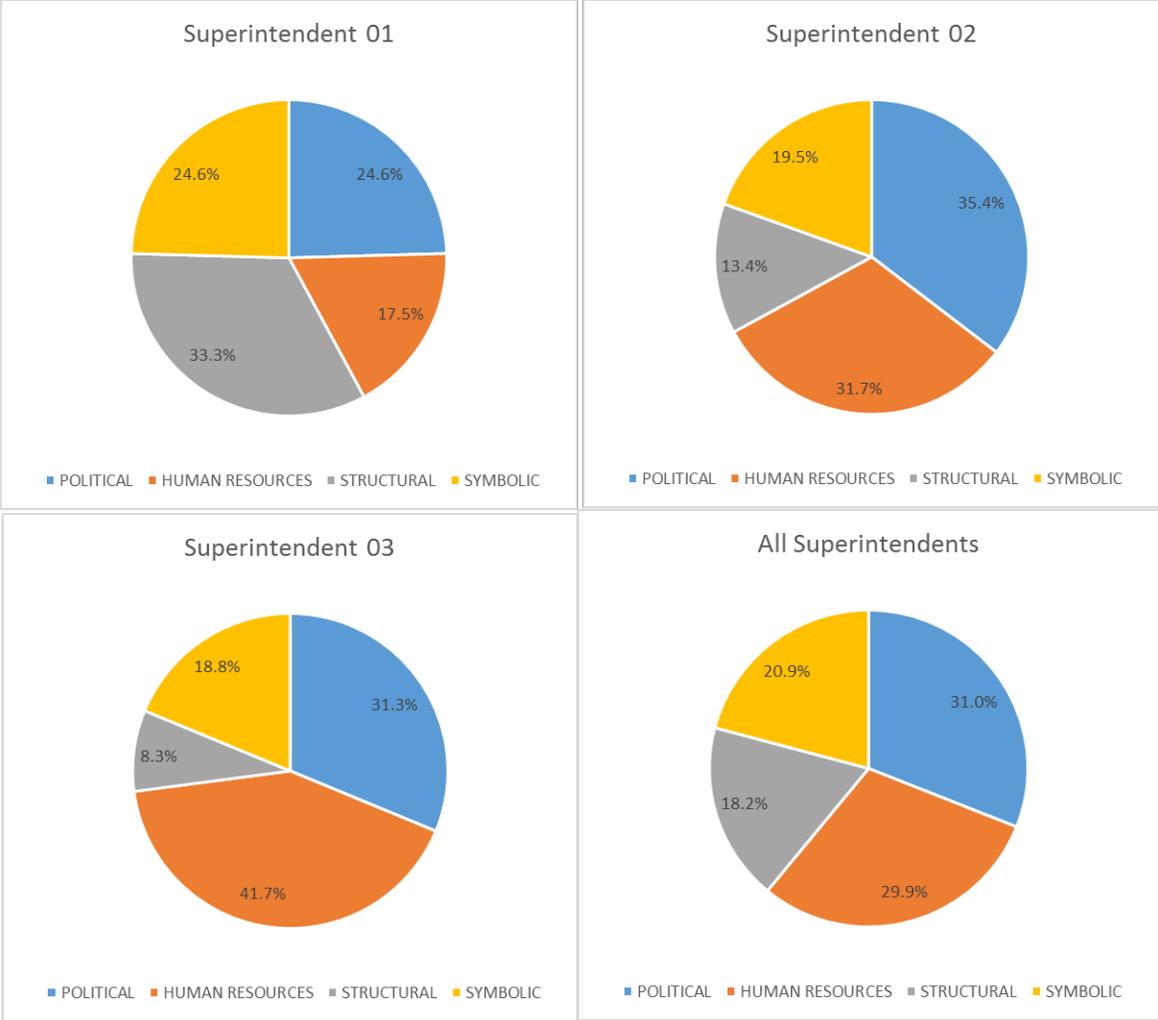


Figure 2. Distributions of the priorities by frame for Superintendents 01, 02, and 03 as well as for all superintendents' priorities.

This was to be expected as a combination of the four perspectives is nearly always warranted when implementing a change initiative (Mcleod, 2017). Therefore, the findings for the second research question focus on each of the framework separately.

**Symbolic frame.** In each of the three districts, the superintendents emphasized the importance of local context in the planning of a districtwide strategic compensation plan.

Superintendent 02 said:

We are more traditional in what we expected teachers to be able to do. So, I wouldn't say you can just slap some pay for performance system on it. The one that we used wouldn't work in any other system. We'd be very careful about that.

Superintendent 01 stated that you have to “observe what’s going on in your district. She observed her district a year before she knew that she wanted to implement a teacher pay reform; however, she spent an additional two years of planning before she introduced it to the board. In her words, she recalled:

I had looked at the data before I ever took the job [as superintendent]. I had studied that extensively and worked with other people before I ever got here. So, I knew the performance was in tremendous need. I told the board, when they hired me, it was a 10-12 year job. To not just turn things around but to get it at a sustainable level. I thought about [teacher salary reform] my first year, but it was, I guess year two or three when we did [our strategic compensation plan]. It was either my second or third year,

Superintendent 02 was explicitly hired with one of the board expectations to implement a pay for performance teacher salary structure. He stated:

[The district was] talking about [teacher salary reform] and so they knew that [I] had done it. So that was one of the seven points for what they wanted. Yup, so another thing I learned in [my former district]. It is a much smaller system, and it worked that, it would have worked even better had we taken two years to, we went from concept to implementation in one year [there]. So I knew it needed to take a longer time.

In the case of Superintendent 02, he took two years before presenting a strategic compensation plan to the school board. Superintendent 03 became superintendent within her own district and

“[she] worked throughout the district in a lot of functions. [She] knew the [context] of the district before [she] became superintendent.”

On a symbolic level, they each encountered unclear understanding of cause and effect with regard to district goals, mainly student achievement, based on the traditions and rituals set forth by the traditional teacher salary schedule. Superintendent 01 noted that “nobody had been evaluated in the in many years. So, there was no accountability and there were no systems.”

Superintendent 01 elaborated:

Well, it's easy to criticize because everything that happens, happens within the context of the time. So, at the time, the standards were very, very old, and they were feeling very, very good about themselves.

In the case of Superintendent 03, she goes further and said, “There's a cultural implication of a salary system that doesn't reward teacher contribution. It sends the message that you just have to be mediocre.”

Value is another recurring theme in the discussions with the superintendents on priorities. Superintendent 02 stated, “no system can operate efficiently if what it values is disconnected from how it compensates people.” In the case of his school district, the traditional salary structure did not place “value” on student performance or teacher performance. He described both the teacher appraisal system and the teacher compensation as acts of compliance. He explained:

Why get anywhere? Why do evaluations? They don't mean anything. So, whether they do it or not, it's like, okay. You want to do it for compliance reasons. Okay, fine, but that's not really affecting the quality of instruction or student outcomes. So, it was a compliance mentality.

Similarly, Superintendent 03 stated, “The reason you want to move away from the [traditional system] is because it's not congruent to how the world works. It doesn't match up with how businesses work. It is not aligned with anything the district truly values.” She elaborated:

Ultimately, we have to attach your salary with what we value. Student achievement, yes. But also, community service, loyalty to the students, and how you work with your fellow teachers and your administrators.

Superintendent 01 also stated that compensation and value are connected; however, she also discussed the unintended outcomes as well when she commented:

[It is important for planning.] the devil's always in the details. Then it was, okay, if we're going to pay the math teacher, what about the music teacher? Are you saying she's less valuable? I'm saying she's less marketable. That was a hard conversation to talk about putting a value of a type of teacher or a content area, I'm going to pay the math teacher more than I'm going to pay the art teacher. It's not that I don't value art, the need is for dynamic math teachers and science teachers.

**Political frame.** With respect to generating a power base to successfully implement a districtwide strategic teacher compensation plan, each superintendent discussed their political relationships between the stakeholders, primarily teacher unions and the school board. Each brought clarity to the support or conflict they experienced in their local context.

It is important to note that each superintendent initially had the support of the school board. Superintendent 01 stated “No, the board and the community in this particular instance were very supportive. Because, if you say, pay for performance to any business person or any community member, they think that's a great thing.” Superintendent 02 was hired with one of the board expectations that he would bring performance pay into the district. He explained:

The other part of the local context, the board wanted [and] had said in the interview process that that's what they wanted. They wanted a merit-based system. They had already started to think about it, but they got stuck and they abandoned it. They had to move forward.

Superintendent 03 also had the support of her school board in the teacher pay reform initiative. She recounted that the school board was:

Very supportive of this view of how to pay staff and teachers. That people could be compensated for the work that they do and have a voice in order to grow. It's part of the vision of the board to have a school system that runs, within reason, competitively with other school districts.

Superintendent 01 and Superintendent 02 both had to confront the issue of patronage, the power to control appointments, that existed in their districts. The school board in the district of Superintendent 01 had the explicit power to appoint and assign campus administrators as a major priority:

Principals got to pick their own Assistant Principals. That was like, why [wound] you not have them pick them? Not that you don't have to assign people at times but for the most part, they pick their teachers and they pick their assistants. That was a weird one to me. Of course, that's because the board picked them.

Superintendent 02 had a similar experience. In his district, the school board did not formally have the power to control any appointments of that nature; however, he recalled:

Things became clearly politically challenging right away because and you can't separate from that, but for example, I dealt with 21 executives directors, right? I get a call from [a trustee]. I get a call from them and they say, "Great idea, having 21 executive directors

makes a lot of sense.” “That’s great, except you need to put this person in this job, this person in that that job.” She had five names, and I said, “Thank you very much. It’s great that you gave me some recommendations. I’ll get the slip, the papers performance part of the interview because it’s competitive.

The day after, only one of the five that she had suggested got it. She gave me a call, and she said, “You don’t know how to be the superintendent. You don’t listen to me. You haven’t been here. You don’t know how to be a superintendent. So, I’m going to try to get rid of you.” Those kinds of politics intersected right away.

The local context of the existing power bases within the respective districts generated discussions about the superintendents’ specific methods of negotiating or shifting power bases. Superintendent 01 “always start[ed] with the board” in general. She described her board as being “business people” rather than educators, and she appealed to their business perspectives to bring gain their support. Superintendent 03 also commented on the importance of a strong school board-superintendent relationship and regarded school board members as representing a business community as follows:

Communicate regularly with the school board so they know how the school district functions for the students. You let them know what you’re doing, why you’re doing it, and show them you are acting responsibly and in the best interest of the district, and most importantly the students.

Superintendent 02 attempted to present “to them a pay for performance plan because I wanted people to understand that if we’re going to make this major change, I too should lead the way.” He further recalled:

If I don't [meet my goals], I'm not progressing. I should be paid less than my current pay. So, I was willing to rewrite the contract, and it should be less than that. If the whole district was proficient too, for example, it should be more than my contract, but I was willing to risk a lot and say, "If I'm not proficient, should I get the money that you guys are going to be paying me for?" Even right away, even in the first year. If I'm not proficient, then you give me less money.

With regard to teacher pay reform, on a political level, fairness became a common theme of priorities. Teacher unions were identified as important stakeholders by the superintendents. Superintendent 01 expressed that "the hard sell was to the Teacher's Union" because:

How am I going to convince the union president that I'm going to pay the math teacher more for success and more to come than I am going to pay the reading teacher? Whatever the case may be. It was all based on [data and the] need and availability of that particular job. [The Union arguments] go all the way down. "Well, what about the Counselor? What about the Cafeteria Manager?" So, in having those conversations with those different groups, first with the leaders and then with some of their constituents, that's how the whole idea evolved.

Superintendent 02 had similar experiences with the teacher unions and illustrated the importance of the teacher union support in the following:

There were no strikes. Why? Because we collaborated and the communications that we had, and we had a lot of it with the union. So, the union, we asked them to do a survey and they did. They surveyed their membership as well. I went to several talks with union members, and there were lots of the reasons why they were split because the potential benefit, and it has turned out to be that.

Much like Superintendent 01, the teacher unions did not enter the conversation with animosity, but they did have questions that centered around fairness and equity. Superintendent 02 recalled that the teacher union was initially split on the idea of a strategic teacher compensation plan and said, “The union split because many of them thought they could get higher salaries, which wasn't going to be the case.” Because he communicated with the unions, he knew the conflict. At that point, Superintendent 02 stated:

In order to get [the strategic teacher compensation plan] passed, I had to try not to take money away from people. That was the biggest seller among the union and teachers that, “Oh, okay, this may be your opportunity to get more in your salary, but no one's going to take my money away.”

Superintendent 03 stated that teacher unions “were not a serious” problem in her district, primarily because of the methods of new employee in-take practices. She explained:

Communication of expectations is what I'm big on. I think that if I let you know in a timely manner, what I expect, there isn't a question. If you say you need a certain salary to get a certain percentage of my students to do this well on a certain test, I will give you 5K more and say, “no excuses.” That's fair.

***Structural frame.*** Each of the three superintendents confirmed that the district organizational structure upon their arrival as superintendent needed to be changed, for various reasons. The local context of this decision varied between superintendents and were both directly and indirectly related to the implementation of the districtwide teacher compensation plans. Superintendent 01 noted that “the organization structure was the source of a lot of the problems. [The organization structure was] a source of a lot of the corruption.” She explained the organizational structure created silos when she explained:

Everybody's working in silos. I'm very much a systems person. So the infrastructure, from top to bottom, including the organizational structure for the staff was in tremendous need. There were two deputies, each of them had charge of half of the kingdom. The [former] superintendent pretty much let them run the kingdom. I set up quarterly reviews with each of the Division Chiefs or Deputies, as the case may be. But the Chiefs and Deputies were equal in terms of rank. And, created divisions. So, what I did was eliminate those positions.

Superintendent 01 said that the organizational structure "was very much a pyramid and I can't operate like that." Because of this, she essentially "flattened the top of the organization." She viewed the campus principals as her "frontline" and flattening the organizational structure would provide them "support and service." She illustrated the results of the restructuring:

What I did was on the [organizational chart], the principals reported to the Chief of School Leadership or the Deputy over School Leadership. But there was broken line from the principals directly to me. And that was always there. This is what we're all about. This is who we serve.

Superintendent 02 observed that the organizational structure was in need of change, but in his case, he expanded the structure rather than flattening it. Much like Superintendent 01, he valued the role the campus principal plays in student achievement as follows:

You have to have a culture of instructional feedback, and you have to have principals who evaluate thoroughly. Not checking the boxes, really understanding what it means to be a good teacher and an effective teacher, really understanding what's going on. If you think you can evaluate teachers by going in once every 6 months or once every 8 months and doing a 30-minute evaluation, then that is going to be unfair.

Superintendent 02 said, “Okay, we're going to have the executive director over each feeder pattern,” and reasoned:

Those Executive Directors would then only have to coach 10 to 12 principals. Not 40 principals. That turned out to be a really good idea, and I don't know if they're still doing it, but I think there's an Executive Director over each feeder pattern to this day, but throughout my whole time there, there's been an executive director over each feeder town to get what the principal needs and to coach, because I also understood that you can't have accountability without support. We had Executive Directors coach principals. Principals then were able to coach teachers and evaluate them fairly.

Superintendent 03 observed a district that was designed to create silos and promote working in isolation therefore, she changed the organizational structure:

And I've had, as the year goes, and because of the growth, and because of the new staff added, we've had to go in and change our organization structure. It's had to become adaptable to the needs of the district.

Superintendent 03 created an organizational structure that surrounded student achievement to achieve a “less hierarchical and more circular” design that represented shared responsibility. She claimed this change was “a great move,” because “communication improved and transparency [increased].”

On a structural level, each superintendent placed importance on the use and analysis of data. As each developed, they designed their own performance monitoring systems.

Superintendent 01 “developed a performance management system” that had:

No strategic plan. There were no measurable outcomes. I don't believe there were any assessments to go on. No benchmarks. So, we did performance management systems and

each division had to meet their goals and outcomes and expectations. I set up quarterly reviews. So, we actually started with the data because we had the capability of looking at by teacher, by student data. So, that was the whole thing.

In Superintendent 01's district, student performance was measured as "value-added, which analysis showed the impact teachers and schools have on students' academic performances. Using this growth metric, teachers, schools, and districts began interpreting the impact of their curriculum, instruction, programs, and practices on student achievement."

The value-added measurement was important because Superintendent 01 wanted to promote "bringing master teachers to schools that need them the most." If the metrics were about "students passing a state assessment, this would not bring together master teachers to the low performing schools would it?" Instead, Superintendent 01 wanted to measure how much growth students made from one year to another based on the impact of a teacher because "the highest rewarded teacher in that system would be a math teacher in the lowest performing high school."

Superintendent 01 valued collaboration and climate and incorporated it in her performance measures:

We didn't want to create competition. That was my motto: "Teaching is a team sport."

We did not want to destroy that culture but just the opposite, encourage that culture. So, from that, evolved the four way ... There are four ways you could [increase your salary].

Take for example. So, if you're the 9th grade math teacher, he's a math teacher, that's why. If you're the 9th grade math teacher and your kids have gained, then you get a certain salary increase. If all the 9th math teachers have gains, that's a second bonus. If all content areas in 9th grade, in your team or whatever the case may be, have gained

statistically significant gains, you get another bonus. And if the whole school has statistically significant gains, you get another bonus.

For Superintendent 03, she had already used student performance on state assessments, both absolute performance (percentage of students achieving the metstandard and commended standard on the STAAR/EOC) and student progress (percentage of students “meeting progress” and “exceeding progress”); however, this presented the problem of “excluding most of your teachers.” Consequently, she expanded the metrics and explained:

We look at the holistic success of the whole child we look at the success of the whole teacher. There are things that are beyond the control of the teacher and things that are in immediate control of the teacher. An example is teacher attendance. We look to see if teachers are actually ... They sign a contract for so many days, do they actually fulfill every single one of those days? Especially are they at work on time? Do they complete and follow the district policy? Are they advancing their own education? Are they taking professional development? Are they adding on certifications? Are they becoming specialist in any particular area? The other thing is extracurricular activities, duties that they perform for the community to enrich the school environment.

These metrics applied to all teachers, and Superintendent 03 believed that universal metric was “very important for district climate.” With respect to state assessments, she conceded that “of course, it’s important to measure their student achievement,” but she did not just rely on state assessments. She administered “the [Iowa Test of Basic Skills] in grades K-10 at the beginning and end of the year to measure growth. Superintendent 03 explained:

We have measures in place that measure this child's skill set at the beginning of the year and that child's skill set at the end of the year. So, we’re not only measuring that teacher’s

success rate against the state test, but we're measuring that teacher's success rate during their calendar year while they are responsible for that child's learning.

A priority in Superintendent 03's district was the dual language program, and because the ITBS test was available in Spanish as the Logramos exam, the district measured the performance students in the bilingual teachers' classrooms in both languages. She summarizes the design of the performance management system as based on wanting "quality teachers who produce quality results, but also have the attitude, the climate, and culture of the district."

Superintendent 02 stated the strategic teacher compensation plan in his district was focused on three factors: (a) teacher results, (b) teacher performance, and (c) student climate survey results. Teacher results were essentially student achievement metrics that only included students whom a teacher "actually instructs." He explained the difference between performance and results:

A teacher performance indicator is a teacher behavior that is observable and that generally can be assessed. However, it does not necessarily contribute directly to improved instruction or student achievement. For example, turning in lesson plans is a process indicator. These metrics provide feedback to teachers and help them gauge their progress and are aligned with teacher evaluation.

Superintendent 02 implemented a progress measure system that was "heavily reliant on teacher and student metrics." Therefore, this measure had:

To be a culture that relies on data or at least understands how to use data because we're about to use data with teachers. So that's not going to work. So, the first thing we did, we put the first part of a pay for performance plan for principals using the [prior year] school year data. So, we were already training principals on their performance evaluation, how

they evaluated teachers. How they conducted [teacher observations], instructional feedback. So, that culture of data analysis started before we implemented a [teacher strategic compensation plan].

We trained them on how [classroom observations] would be conducted. We trained them on how to use data. We trained teachers on all that. We trained them on PLCs. We trained them on all the leverage points that we knew at the time and they got pretty good at it, the ones who remained.

***Human resources frame.*** In the previous frameworks, local context was explained as background information and knowledge which enhanced understanding of each superintendent's perspectives. On a human resources level, the local context is the priority and the central theme of this framework. Communication and/or feedback systems were developed by each of the superintendents to support their teachers throughout the implementation process. Superintendent 01 stressed the importance of communication by stating, "Anytime that I did something to support the schools, it started with a lot of thought and talk and communication." Superintendent 02 similarly stated that "during the implementation process," it "required a lot of communications, internal and external. So, we did have a communications department. I mean, they did a lot around communications." Superintendent 02 explained:

If you have accountability without support, you have a climate of fear because you still have to have accountability, but the only way to avoid a climate of fear is to have support.

He said "we asked [teachers] to do surveys and they did. We set up focus groups as well. I went to several talks with teacher teams, because, you know, they need to feel empowered and

supported.” Superintendent 02 also said that “when I say communication, I’m talking about two-way communication.” For example, he observed:

We said that their evaluation would include student surveys. So, student surveys. So we designed that with teachers. We asked them what the percentage would be and things like that. So that's what it came out to be. So yeah, so those metrics became about, being an instructional leader and having an instructional team.

He said there are certain things “that you know from research, but there is a lot of things you have to adjust throughout the process.” It was teacher communication that created the “focus on growth” in his performance measure system. He said teachers wanted student performance to bear more weight in the evaluation, “so even though 35% is based on achievement, most of that 35%, most of that piece of the pie is not just proficiency. It's growth. So, [he] included growth and that made teachers happy, too.”

Superintendent 03 said “communication is part of [the] culture” in her district. She stated she believes she “establish[ed] a culture communication first through modeling.” She confirmed she has structured meetings and views it as a “nested system”:

We spend a lot of time communicating the mission and vision of the district. We also promote gratitude and appreciation for teachers. The metrics that we measure are also explained. This is shared from the superintendent to the cabinet, who then communicate it to principals and central administration, and so on and so forth, right down to the teachers or students.

Superintendent 03 continued by emphasizing “two-way communication” in the following:

You have to truly value teachers [by] telling them, “You matter to me. Tell me what you need for our students to be the best then can be.” And that, in turn, makes them feel

valued and appreciated. And a lot of educators are intrinsically motivated, but it changes your life when somebody knows and appreciates what you've done for the district. And that gratuity normally only comes in the form of money, which is why it's called gratuity. But that isn't the only way.

Superintendent 03 sent out regular communications directly to the teacher and staff of the district to “remind or reiterate” the district mission, initiatives, and “celebrate people who are doing a great job.”

Superintendent 01 had a similar belief in communicating with teachers. She said there is “what you intend and what you actually get” during implementation of the teacher compensation plan. She stated:

It's the definition of insanity. Doing the same thing and expecting different results.

When you talk about “feedback,” I'm an equal opportunity girl. And what I know from communicating with teachers is money alone is not enough. It's not worth it. Not worth it you have to create a whole culture for them to thrive in a feel good about. If they're already in that kind of culture, \$10,000 is not going to make my life ... What I have to put in, to those kinds of schools. It was a lot in the marketing. That's how we sold it.

**Summary of findings for Research Question 2.** Research Question 2 showed that each superintendent had prioritized the considerations through each of Bolman and Deal's Four Frames. The priorities presented by the superintendents in the development and implementation of a districtwide strategic teacher compensation plan were:

1. Superintendent must understand the local context of the school district
2. Teacher compensation needs to align with what the district values
3. Superintendents need to clearly define expectations for fairness, and

4. Accountability without support creates a culture of fear.

The superintendents identified considerations at varying levels in relation to these priorities; however, they shared common uses of the lenses with respect to whether it was during planning and design or implementation. From the data elicited from the interviews, the concept of teacher salary reform is implicitly symbolic, as there is a long-established tradition of the traditional salary schedule.

In the symbolic framework, each superintendent's priorities in the symbolic framework aligned with the unclear cause and effect of district actions and district goals and the resulting need to create a new value system.

In the political framework, the superintendents' responses placed greatest emphasis on their dealings with their respective school boards and the teacher unions. With respect to the school board, the three superintendents claimed that the concept of a districtwide strategic compensation plan was initially supported by their school board and that their perceptions of the plan was important. Superintendent 01 and Superintendent 03 prioritized communicating with their boards and gaining support through appealing to them in their terms, which each considered to be a business perspective. Both stated that they had full support of the school board throughout the planning and implementation of their plans. Superintendent 01 and Superintendent 02 identified patronage as being an obstacle with the school board in their respective districts, and both prioritized changing it. In dealing with teacher unions and teachers individually, fairness became a common theme in negotiating and building coalition with teachers and teacher unions. Superintendent 01 and 02 both expressed the importance of having the teacher unions in support of the compensation plan. Superintendent 03 did not prioritize working with teacher unions, but rather working directly with the teachers.

In the structural framework, the superintendents placed greatest emphasis on the analysis of data and development of a clear performance management system. In the case of Superintendent 01, she created a performance management system which was aligned to her vision and district goals. In her case, teachers were evaluated on a value-added metric. In order to support this data metric and the utilization and use of data, various structures were created, such as common instructional frameworks from the Curriculum and Instruction department and Professional Learning Communities through Elementary and Secondary Campus Operations. Superintendent 02 created a performance management system that took into account teacher practice, teacher results, and student climate surveys. In order to support this data metric and the utilization and use of data, various structures were created, such as interim assessments from Accountability, Information Systems, and Technology and a new appraisal system implemented through Human Resources. Superintendent 03 created a performance management system that took into account teacher results, professional attributes such as attendance and continuous improvement, and practices which positively impact campus climate and culture. In order to support this data metric and the utilization and use of data, various structures were created, such as additional Beginning-of Year and End-of-Year national assessments from Accountability, Information Systems, and Technology and a detailed teacher compensation system implemented through Human Resources that fostered ownership in the strategic compensation system of the district.

In the human resources framework, each superintendent prioritized the concept of morale through two-way communication. Each superintendent developed strategies that focused on supporting all stakeholders to meet the district goals and initiatives as well as empower all stakeholders with strategic two-way communication and feedback opportunities. Each

superintendent elicited the use of surveys and common sense-making meeting throughout the year in order to gain essential data on the efficacy of the strategic teacher compensation plan from the teacher perspective. Through two-way communication, Superintendent 01 was able to market her program from a collaborative and positive climate incentive rather than just a financial benefit. Superintendent 02 was able to gather teacher buy in by having teachers provide input in the development of distributive weights of the new teacher appraisal system. Superintendent 03 was able to have one-on-one conversations with teachers about district support, campus climate and culture, and other factors which affect a teacher's attrition or retention.

### **Research Question 3**

This research question asked the following: What differences and commonalities are expressed by superintendents in comparable school districts regarding considerations and priorities? The data were gathered through interview questions with respect to both superintendent considerations and superintendent priorities.

#### **Considerations**

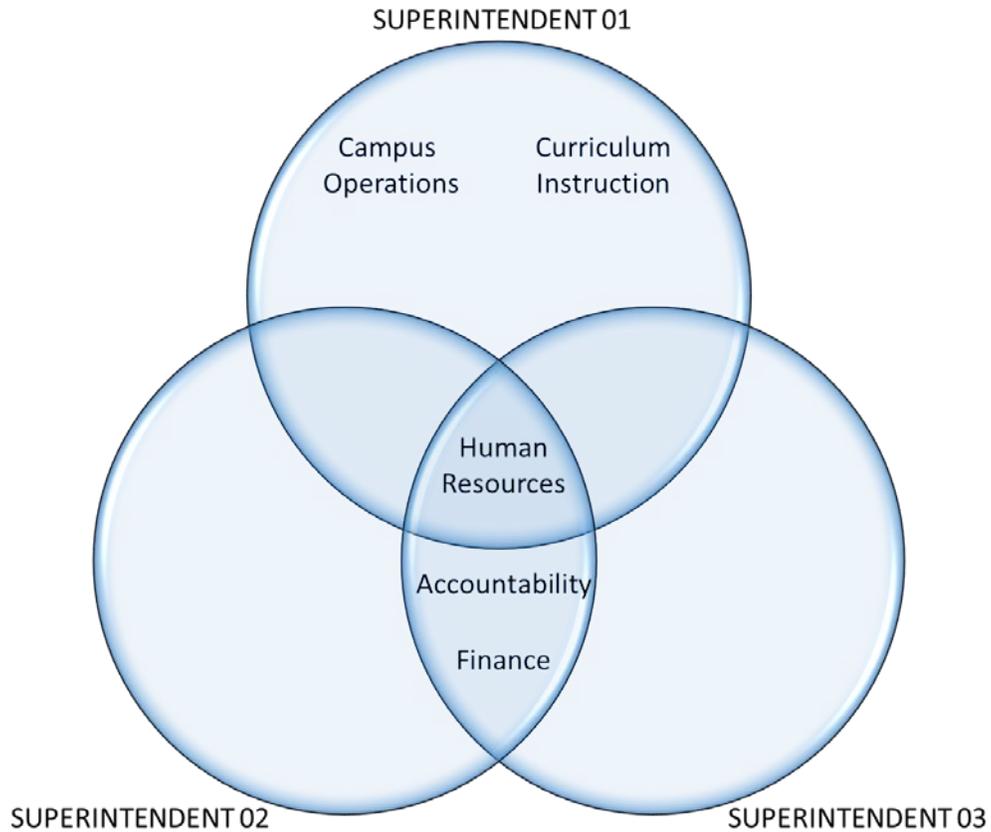
Superintendent responses were then grouped and categorized through use of Olivarez's Ten Functions of School Districts. The resulting distribution of individual superintendent responses regarding considerations is shown in Table 5.

Table 5

*Overview of the Three Superintendents' Considerations by Function*

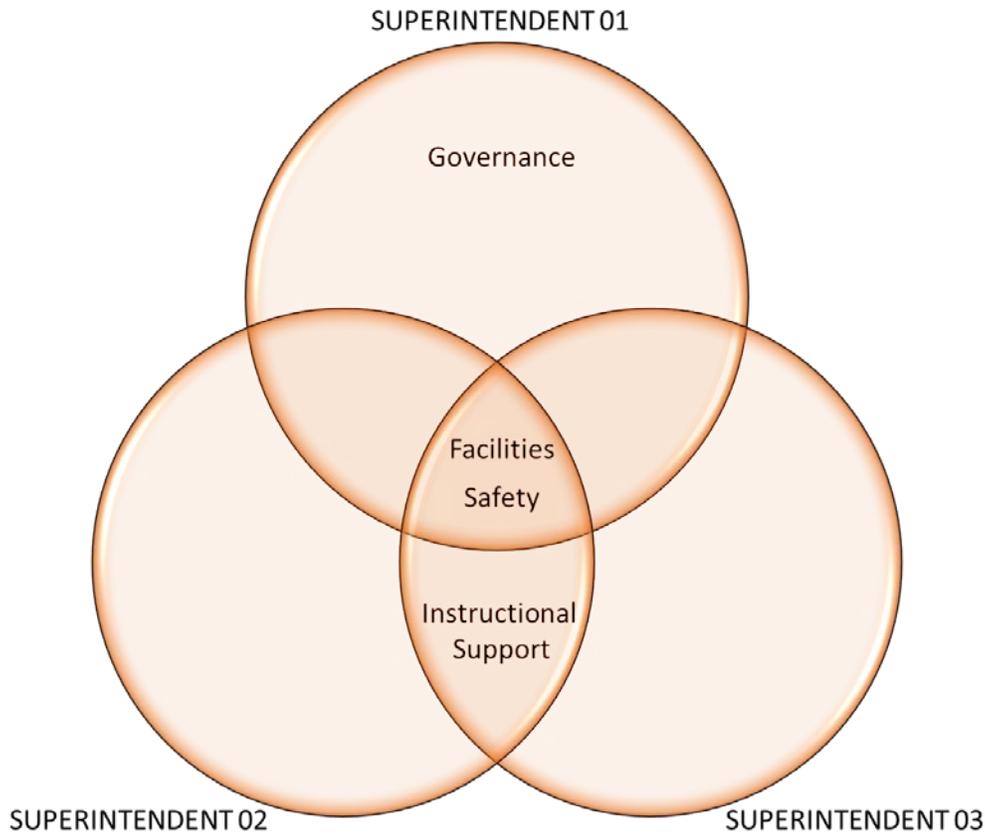
Function	% Superintendent 01	% Superintendent 02	% Superintendent 03
GOV	3.4	12.7	7.2
C&I	17.4	9.3	12.8
CAMP	10.7	7.6	14.4
SUPP	5.6	6.8	4.8
HR	22.5	20.3	20.8
SAFE	4.5	1.7	0.8
TECH	9.6	16.1	16.0
COMM	14.0	8.5	7.2
FAC	3.9	2.5	0.8
FIN	8.4	14.4	15.2

The considerations can further be sorted by most referenced functions and their least referenced functions. With respect to considerations, there were commonalities in the distribution of considerations within each of the ten functions. First, each superintendent had a consideration in each function. Second, when looking at functions with the most considerations (the top three functions by percentage), a Venn diagram was created as seen in Figure 3.



*Figure 3.* Venn diagram of the three most discussed functions by number of considerations.

The function of Human Resources represented the function with the most considerations among the three participants. The data showed Superintendent 02 and Superintendent 03 shared the same top three functions. When looking at functions with the least considerations (the bottom three functions by percentage), a Venn diagram can be created as seen in Figure 4.



*Figure 4.* Venn diagram of the three least discussed functions by number of considerations

The functions of Facilities, and Plant Operations and Instruction Support Services represented the functions with the least considerations among the participants. The findings show that Superintendent 02 and Superintendent 03 shared the same bottom three functions.

With respect to priorities, there were commonalities in the distribution of considerations within each of the ten functions. First, each superintendent had a consideration in each frame.

The distribution for each superintendent resulted in differing proportions of priorities categorized by framework. Superintendent 01 showed more dominance in the Structural framework, whereas Superintendent 02 and Superintendent 03 leaned more prevalently toward the Political framework and the Human Resources framework, respectively. The data suggested a commonality existed in the use of the framework with respect to the priorities described in the

planning phase and the priorities described in the implementation phase of the strategic teacher compensation plan. Each superintendent showed a common usage of the frameworks as illustrated in Figure 5.

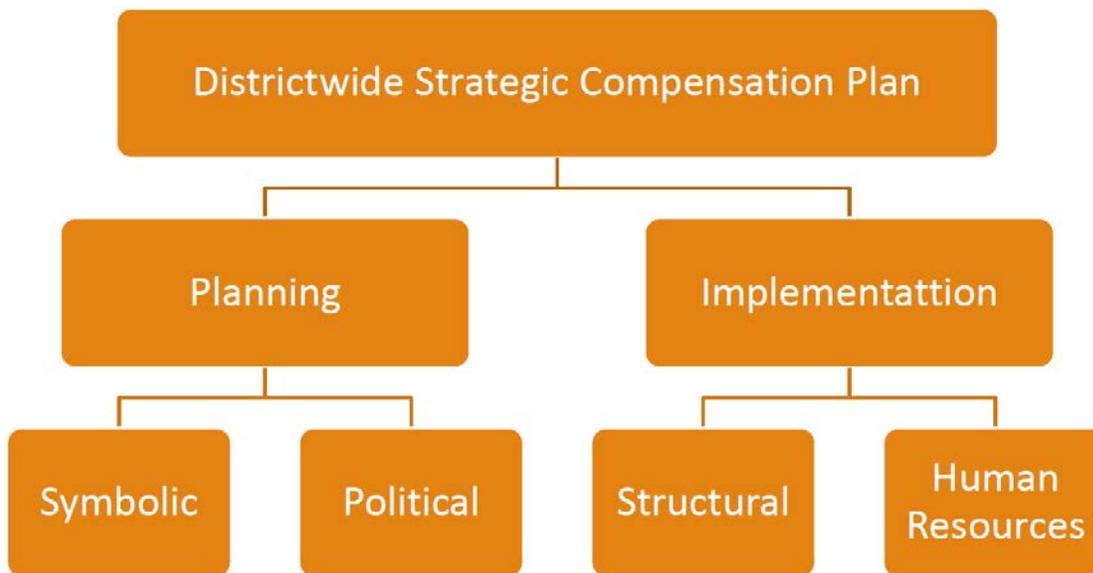


Figure 5. Bolman and Deal’s Four Frames in planning and implementation.

The resulting responses from the superintendents showed more emphasis on the Symbolic and Political frameworks during the planning phase and more emphasis on the Structural and Human Resources framework during the implementation phase.

**Summary of the findings for Research Question 3.** Answering this research question involved comparing the considerations and the priorities among the three superintendent participants. With respect to considerations, there were commonalities in the distribution of considerations within each of the ten functions. Each superintendent had a consideration in each function. Second, when looking at functions with the most considerations (the top three functions by percentage), the function of Human Resources represented the function with the most considerations among the participants. When looking at functions with the least considerations (the bottom three functions by percentage), the functions of Facilities, and Plant

Operations and Instruction Support Services represented the functions with the least considerations among the participants.

With respect to priorities, there were commonalities in the distribution of considerations within each of the frames. The distribution for each superintendent resulted in differing proportions of priorities categorized by framework. Superintendent 01 showed more dominance in the Structural framework, whereas Superintendent 02 and Superintendent 03 leaned more prevalently towards the Political framework and the Human Resources Framework respectively. The data depicted a commonality in the use of the framework with respect to the priorities described in the planning phase and the priorities described in the implementation phase of the strategic teacher compensation plan. Each superintendent showed more emphasis on the symbolic and political frameworks during the planning phase of their plans and more emphasis on the structural and human resources framework during the implementation phase.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Recommendations**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the phenomenon of implementing districtwide teacher salary reform with superintendents of public schools in Texas. This study provided information to school administrators and researchers about the considerations and priorities by superintendent in implementing teacher pay reform. This study examined superintendents' leadership perceptions and teacher compensation issues that affect school districts' operations in the state of Texas. This chapter includes a summary of the study and findings, discussion, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research.

### **Summary of the Study**

This study was conducted to examine the role of the superintendent in teacher salary reform in Texas. It analyzed the perceptions of current and former superintendents with substantial experience involved in the implementation of a districtwide strategic teacher salary plan. There was a need to employ a qualitative study to address the research questions. Multiple data sources were utilized. The first was an inspection and analysis of district documents that elaborate the goals, strategies and implementation details of the strategic teacher compensation plan. These data included school board documents and policy-related artifacts including the district compensation plan. The second data source consisted of one-on-one interviews conducted by the researcher of superintendents. The one-on-one interviews of superintendents allowed the researcher to collect the participants' perceptions as a primary data source, ensure credibility, and provide for the triangulation of information sources. An emphasis to Olivarez's ten functions were explored with three superintendents as well as Bolman and Deal's frameworks.

Three superintendents participated in semi-structured interviews conducted face to face, and multiple interactions with the researcher and participant occurred. Each interview lasted between 60 minutes and 90 minutes. The interview guide was followed. Every attempt was made to enable the participants to feel comfortable and understood and to ensure clarity in the data. The participants offered candid answers, as seen in Chapter 4. The interviews gave the participants the opportunity to share their reflections according to their specific perspectives on implementing districtwide teacher salary reform of public school districts in Texas. Member checking occurred throughout the process to ensure that the credibility and trustworthiness of the research was assured. The researcher ensured the credibility of the study was tantamount throughout the research process.

Data related to the three superintendents' roles in implementing districtwide strategic compensation plan were collected to answer the study's three research questions. The data from the individual interviews were analyzed with elaborative coding because of the need to determine the veracity of the ten functions (Saldaña, 2013). Each interview's data were reviewed in conjunction with the other interviews' data to be sure that no information or key findings were missed in the analysis process. NVivo software was used to complete the data analysis.

### **Summary of the Findings**

In Chapter 4, the three research questions were answered. Consistent throughout the data, all three superintendents included in the study were limited to school districts who meet the components of "first mover" school districts with regard to teacher salary reform. The components to which they referred were the following:

- Affects base salary

- Measures teacher effectiveness
- Addresses speed of salary growth
- Establishes career pathway opportunities
- Considers incentives for hard-to-staff schools and positions
- Considers bonuses, rewards, and recognition
- Considers the opt-in timeframe.

All participants had held the role of superintendent during the planning and implementation process of a districtwide strategic teacher compensation plan in their respective districts. The superintendents identified considerations at varying levels in relation to the ten functions. Figure 6 displays examples of comments for five of the ten functions. In the human resources function, the participants reported that the need to reform teacher pay was not a teacher shortage problem, but rather a teacher quality problem. They say the quality problem as new teachers lacking preparation and master teachers being lost to administrator positions or other career options due to insufficient pay.

The superintendents identified priorities related to the considerations as well. The priorities discussed by the superintendents represented at varying levels in relation to Bolman and Deal's four Frameworks. Much as expected, a combination of the four perspectives was warranted when implementing the change initiative of teacher pay reform. Each of the three superintendents, however, emphasized different dominant frameworks. Superintendent 01 emphasized the structural framework, while Superintendent 02 emphasized the political framework. Superintendent 03 emphasized the human resources framework. Though different emphasis was made by each superintendent with respect to the frames, the priorities within each frame were congruent.

Human Resources	Accountability, Information Systems, and Technology	Finance and Business
Recruiting needs to address attracting master teachers  Retention needs to account that new teachers need strong instructional support Retention needs to incentivize staying in the classroom  Attrition needs to be strategic The qualities of effective teachers need to be expanded  Districts must be competitive with the labor market to recruit and retain the best  Teacher training and preparation is a monetary investment	District needs a teacher evaluation model that is aligned to district values, linked to data, and designed to support	Sustainability is a function of planning.  Districts can embed systems/controls to mitigate unexpected consequences of teacher merit based pay rewards such as target distribution  Districts cannot reward high performing teachers if they carry the financial burden of low performing teachers
Curriculum and Instruction	School Leadership	
District needs to provide the tools teachers need to do the job: viable curriculum, system to accurately assess teacher quality, and provide curriculum support staff.	Superintendents need to recognize that principals and school success are linked Principals needs to have a degree of freedom and flexibility	

Figure 6. Examples of the superintendent considerations applied to the Ten Functions of School Districts.

In the symbolic frame, each superintendent noted that the traditional salary schedule was not aligned with district goals, creating a climate where the cause and effects unclear. As such, the superintendents of each district had to create a vision that placed value on the things that would accomplish the goals set out by the district. In the political framework, each superintendent prioritized the concept of fairness as they recognized teacher pay reform would be allocating a scarce resource with diverse interest groups. The concept of fairness made it a necessity to mitigate conflicts through negotiation or compromise.

In the structural frame, each superintendent prioritized the use of data and the development of performance management systems. In some cases, the use of management systems meant superintendents had to make the organizational structure bigger in some areas,

even though in other cases, they made the organizational structure smaller. The common priority among the participating superintendents was the need to define the metrics used by the district to measure goals and reduce uncertainty, or ambiguity.

In the human resources frame, each superintendent prioritized the concept of morale through two-way communication. Each superintendent developed strategies that focused on supporting all stakeholders to meet the district goals and initiatives as well as empower all stakeholders with strategic two-way communication and feedback opportunities.

In addition to the commonalities under each frame, another similarity arose in the relationship between each frame and the planning and implementation of a districtwide strategic teacher compensation plan. The superintendents commonly leveraged the symbolic and political frames in the planning of the strategic plan and leveraged the structural and human resources during the implementation process.

### **Limitations**

The limitations of this study will be due to issues beyond the researcher's control that may prevent findings from being generalized statewide or nationally. Texas law is unique and may prevent the findings from applying to school districts in other states. Next, every school district operates differently and offers different challenges that generate different needs. This study specifically looks at school districts that fit the criteria of “first mover districts” which contain the following elements as part of their comprehensive approach to redesign compensation: (a) base salary; (b) teacher effectiveness; (c) speed of salary growth; (d) career pathway opportunities; (e) incentives for hard-to-staff schools and positions; (f) bonuses, rewards, and recognition; and (g) the opt-in timeframe (Miles et al., 2015). Though the criteria helps narrow the scope of the research, it limits the transferability to districts that may lack one

or more of these elements. Finally, unconsciously held biases by the researcher, who is a charter school Assistant Superintendent, may affect the generalizability. Therefore, the researcher will maintain a reflection log to identify and overcome those biases.

## **Discussion**

In reviewing the literature for the purpose of this study, the data gathered in this study aligned with the literature. The history of teacher salary reform can garner insight into the cyclical nature of teacher pay reform and their relationship between economic and societal factors (Protsik, 1995). Springer (2009) predicted changes in the economic and societal needs would result in the shifting away from the Traditional Salary Schedule. In the current educational landscape, the following areas were cited as potential needs:

- Shortage of Quality Teachers
- Difficulty Recruiting Teachers to Meet Growing Demand
- Difficulty in Retaining Quality Teachers
- Inequitable Distribution of Quality Teachers
- Changing Workforce

### **Shortage of Quality Teachers**

Education research has shown that teacher quality is the single strongest determinant of student achievement (Goldhaber, 2009). Ensuring that every classroom is taught by a high-quality teacher is one of the most important actions of a school district (Hanushek, 2016). The results of this study showed superintendents observed a shortage of quality teachers is a problem and that this was a consideration in implementing a districtwide strategic compensation plan.

According to Kennedy (20110), defining teacher quality is difficult and definitions of teacher quality range from relying solely on student achievement as measured by standardized

test scores to more complex dimensions that include (in addition to test scores) descriptors of the teaching practices and collaborative and cooperative practices. The results of this study agrees with the literature and shows that superintendents believe that quality teaching is defined by the local context of district values. Superintendents prioritize defining quality during the planning phase of the strategic teacher compensation plan through the symbolic frame.

### **Difficulty Recruiting Teachers to Meet Growing Demand**

The literature suggested that the school districts will have difficulty in recruiting teachers. One factor cited that contribute to this growing problem is non-competitive salaries. While A Nation at Risk recommended “professionally competitive” salaries for teachers, most school districts have not successfully attained this goal (1983, p. 38). Other factors proposed by the literature include “an increase in school enrollment due to increased immigration and higher birth rates for some races and ethnicities and are magnified when coupled with declining class sizes due to state policies that impose class size caps (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). The results of this study shows that superintendents do believe that the traditional salary schedule is not competitive; however, superintendents do not view the shortage of teachers to mean the lack of teachers to accommodate vacancies. The study shows that superintendents believe that there is a shortage of quality teachers due to the non-competitive professional salaries of teachers under the traditional salary structure. Superintendents believe that the traditional salary structure does not incentivize teachers to master the teaching craft and promotes a culture of mediocrity.

### **Difficulty in Retaining Quality Teachers**

While teacher recruitment efforts bring teachers into the education field, teacher attrition represents the rate at which teachers leave the field (Borman & Dowling, 2008). Almost 20% of

new public school teachers leave after the first year, and almost half leave after their first 5 years (Sutcher et al., 2016). Margolis (2008) studied teacher attrition and found that teacher salaries are significantly low compared to the market's needs and causes highly skilled potential teachers to opt for more competitive higher earning positions in other fields. Margolis added that "retaining the best teachers will depend on salary reforms, including merit pay, so that the talented can afford to stay in the profession and be compensated justly for their gifts" (p. 4). The results of the study suggest that superintendents agree that retaining quality teachers is a consideration for school districts. Superintendents believe that master teachers are disincentivized to remain in the classroom and either promote up in the district or exit from the profession.

While salary is the primary factor in the recruitment of teachers, teacher attrition is influenced by other factors that are more contextual. When teachers decide to leave the teaching profession, they are influenced by school conditions, their perceptions of preparedness and effectiveness, and levels of in-service support (Podgursky, 2011). Jensen, Yamashiro, and Tibbetts (2010) showed that lack of support and resources influence attrition. Johnson and Birkeland (2003) found "few prospects for improvement or success, either in their schools or in other public schools" (p. 584) were the reasons some teachers opted to leave the teaching profession. The results of the study suggest that superintendents agree that support is a critical consideration to retaining teachers. The data gathered from superintendent responses lended support for providing training and the tools needed to teach within a healthy school culture and climate. Both factors required the superintendents to define district values clearly and align their efforts with the functions of the district to support them.

## **Inequitable Distribution of Quality Teachers**

Pay systems in public education typically do not recognize the labor market reality that some teachers have more competitive and financially lucrative opportunities outside of teaching than others (Podgursky, 2011). Higher salaries are needed for these schools' teachers to recognize the market demands for hiring highly qualified teachers teaching in schools serving low-income communities; higher salaries for these harder-to-staff schools' teachers could have a positive impact on recruitment (Borman & Dowling, 2008). The results from this study does not suggest that all superintendents make hard-to-staff school and schools serving low-income communities as being a consideration. One superintendent or the three superintendent participants noted this as a factor. The other two superintendents did report wanting quality teachers in every classroom, however, there was no consideration to incentivizing certain schools or communities over others.

## **Changing Workforce**

Research on the topic of teacher pay reform indicated this new generation of teachers supports removing ineffective teachers from classrooms (Margolis, 2008). Literature reveals that because all teachers are rewarded according to their years of service and levels of education, no extrinsic penalty for ineffective teaching exists (Hanushek, 2007). The results from this study does not provide any conclusion on the perceptions of teachers; however, two out of the three superintendents placed consideration to strategic teacher attrition for low performing teachers. Those superintendents, however, viewed this consideration as financial sustainability rather than teacher climate and culture.

## **Conceptual Framework**

Bolman and Deal's (2008) leadership framework and Olivarez's (2013) Ten Functions of School Districts were synthesized together to improve understanding of the role of the superintendent in planning and implementing a districtwide strategic teacher compensation plan in Texas. This study attempted to apply the conceptual framework to determine the role of the superintendent in the planning and implementation of a districtwide strategic teacher compensation plan. The conceptual framework discussed in Chapter 2 can be applied to this process. The 10 functions of the school district and the work of Bolman and Deal (2008) to the charter school superintendent offered an integrative theoretical lens. Bolman and Deal provided understanding of the superintendent prioritizations of the considerations which related to the functions. Bolman and Deal's four-domain framework applied to the overall operations of school superintendents and acted as a guiding model throughout the process and included: (a) Structural, (b) Human Resources, (c) Political, and (c) Symbolic. In looking at the data, the four frames were sorted as prevalent in either the planning phase or the implementation phase of the districtwide strategic compensation plan. During the planning phase, the symbolic and political frames were dominant as implicated by superintendents. During the implementation phase, the structural and human resources frames were dominant as implicated by superintendents in determining prioritization.

The symbolic frame really related to the superintendents' visions and goals for their respective school districts. The symbolic frame focused on how people in an organization use meaning and beliefs to create value through the superintendents' responses to the interview questions. During the planning phase of the strategic compensation plan, the superintendents suggested that their primary role was to set the vision for the district. On the one hand, the superintendent had to be cognizant of the local context in their district and analyze the impact of

the traditions and symbolic nature of the teacher salary structure and compare it to their goals and values. Though the local context varied from district to district, each superintendent observed incongruence in the existing compensation model and that of their district goals. As the symbolic frame revolved around values and traditions, each superintendent independently concluded that the traditional salary structure which rewarded years of service and levels of education was not aligned with student achievement. Each superintendent subsequently identified what measures and metrics would align to the established student achievement goals.

The political frame affecting the organization was connected to the symbolic frame. This political dimension affected the superintendents' setting of agendas and progress toward goals (Bolman & Deal, 2008). In the political frame, superintendents worked to negotiate and influence the various interest groups to share in their new value system. The school board and the teacher unions were identified as the interest groups that the superintendents prioritized. This phase lasted for years in the participants' school districts.

The structural frame refers to the roles and responsibilities of people within the organization. Each superintendent noted the utilization and analysis of data as being the major factor in prioritization. Each school district's organizational structure was different and required different actions from each superintendent to accomplish this. Superintendent 01 flattened her organizational chart and developed a performance management system based on the ability for teachers to add value to students in student performance on standardized tests, whereas Superintendent 03 created a holistic system that measured student performance (absolute and progress) as well as attributes including involvement in school and community activities and evidence of continuous professional improvement. The organizational structure was built to fit

the each organization's current circumstances based on workforce, goals, technology, and environment (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

The human resource frame supported the people who work in the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2008). In this context, the superintendents noted the importance of attaining a two-way communication channel with the stakeholders, primarily the teachers. All three superintendents referred to receiving constant feedback from teachers through various meetings, surveys, and feedback systems.

The integration of the frames in this manner was shown to be a commonality among the superintendents. With the evidence from this study and the results of the research conducted in the review of literature shows a model for how superintendents can successfully implement a districtwide teacher compensation plan. In particular, the importance of local context in the development of values. It is from the values of the superintendent to which the various considerations within the ten functions are aligned.

### **Implications for Practice**

The implications for practice suggest the superintendents needed to implement a districtwide strategic compensation plan in order to increase the number of quality teachers in their district. The superintendents shared a common understanding that new teachers lack preparation to be successful in their district without considerable support. The measures the superintendents used to determine quality teaching varied by district and were based on the core values of the district's superintendent and the district at large. In addition to districts having to provide intensive professional development for new teachers their first year, the findings encourage indoctrinating new teachers with knowledge and understanding of the district values

as quickly as possible. There is a need for teacher certification programs to build relationships and with school districts as part of aligning teacher preparation with real-life contexts.

Also, superintendents undergoing the development and implementation of a districtwide strategic compensation plan made considerations from each of Olivarez's Ten Functions of School Districts and prioritized these considerations using each of Bolman and Deal's Four Frames. The data suggested commonalities in the integration of both the functions and the frameworks as shown in the conceptual framework during the planning and implementation process of their strategic plans. Regional service centers, therefore, should offer a cooperative and collaborative environment offering inclusive training and resources to superintendents on both the ten functions and the four frames to build superintendent leadership capacity. The findings suggested training on the conceptual framework as a model for superintendents wanting to implement a strategic teacher compensation plan is a need to understand what superintendents experienced while leading such a process.

Finally, the superintendents' acknowledged that the evaluation of teachers both in how they were compensated and in how they were appraised were insufficient. Moreover, the three superintendents place significant value on additional metrics that included capacity for teamwork and collaboration, connection to the school climate and culture, and involvement with student activities and community engagement. The State Board of Educator Certification should examine the competencies currently used in teacher certification to align them with current teaching realities provided by superintendents.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Several research recommendations emerge from the findings. First is the need to understand the obstacles that deter Texas superintendents from implementing a districtwide

strategic teacher compensation plans. There are factors when examining urban school districts, such as surrounding business' financial support, which are not available in all areas of the state. Examining the effects of Texas legislation, funding policies, and other statewide factors can expand the relevance of the study.

Secondly, the superintendent was but one level of implementation of any districtwide program. This study examined the thoughts and perceptions of the superintendent in implementing a strategic teacher compensation plan. A need to study the perceptions of principals and/or other district leadership in the implementation of a districtwide strategic compensation plan continues following this study. Many of the considerations and priorities discussed by the superintendents in this study directly implicated principals and other district personnel. Those professionals' perspectives may lead to additional insight on the planning and implementation process in a school district or the alignment of superintendent perceptions with constituent members of the organization. At the time of this study, Texas was in the process of transitioning to a new accountability system that would redefine the measures and goals of school districts and the different levels in which they were evaluated. Future researchers may study the effect that any new or future accountability rating system has on the considerations and priorities of existing districtwide strategic teacher compensation plans.

## Appendix A: Superintendent Interview Questions

Interviewee:            1            2            3            4            5            Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Open-ended Interview Questions

#### Demographic

1. What is your role in the district?
2. How long have you been in your role in your career?
3. How long have you been this role in this district?
4. How many years of your administrative career taken place in Texas school districts?

#### District Historical Perspective

5. What departments and/or personnel were involved? What were they responsible for?
6. What do you think changed in the district that caused the need for reform?
7. What metrics do you attribute the needs and/or concerns?

#### Prompts:

What was the state of teacher quality in the district?

What was the state of teacher recruitment in the district?

What was the state of teacher attrition in the district?

What was the state of the workforce and their attributes in the district?

#### District Strategic Teacher Compensation Plan

8. As the instructional leader, what was your top priority?
9. What structures/features, if any, of the strategic teacher compensation plan affected:

- a. Governance Operations; What was it meant to accomplish?
- b. Curriculum and Instruction; What was it meant to accomplish?
- c. Elementary and Secondary School Campus Operations; What was it meant to accomplish?
- d. Instructional Support Services; What was it meant to accomplish?
- e. Human Resources; What was it meant to accomplish?
- f. Operation Support; What was it meant to accomplish?
- g. Accountability, Information Management, and Technology Services; What was it meant to accomplish?
- h. External and Internal Communications; What was it meant to accomplish?
- i. Facilities Planning and Plant Services; What was it meant to accomplish?
- j. Administrative, Finance, and Business Operations; What was it meant to accomplish?

Prompts:

Were there political implications?

Were there structural/organizational implications?

Were there human resources implications?

Were there symbolic implications?

What would be the measures of success?

What obstacles did you foresee if any?

How were those responsible held accountable?

Leadership Reflections of Implementation

10. In your opinion, was the districtwide plan successful in meeting the initial goals?
11. What were the strongest features of the districts strategic teacher compensation plan?
12. What were the weakest features of the districts strategic teacher compensation plan?

Prompts:

After experiencing the implementation of the strategic compensation plan, what features would you have changed?

After experiencing the implementation of the strategic compensation plan, what features would you have added?

After experiencing the implementation of the strategic compensation plan, what features would you have removed?

Did it change how you understand your role (as a principal or as a superintendent)?

Did it change how you do your job (conduct your business)?

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