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**Learning to Manage the Fiscal Responsibilities  
of the Superintendency**

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**Learning to Manage the Fiscal Responsibilities  
of the Superintendency**

by

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## **Dedication**

To my husband, Robert Hausman. Thank you for your support and encouragement throughout this journey. The fact that I was able to complete my coursework and treatise in such a short timeframe is largely in part due to you. The demands of the program coupled with my decision to become a full-time student in my second year challenged us both to step into very different roles. While we both knew going back to school would challenge me to grow personally and professionally, I'm not sure we anticipated how our relationship would also grow stronger. I'll be forever grateful for the sacrifices you made in order to make this goal a reality and I look forward to writing the next chapter of our lives together. I love you.

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## **Abstract**

# **Learning to Manage the Fiscal Responsibilities of the Superintendency**

by

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Nearly one hundred years of research identifies the topic of school finance as one of the most serious challenges facing superintendents. Superintendents are responsible for overseeing the day-to-day fiscal operations and entrusted to manage large amounts of public funds. The scope of this responsibility combined with a perceived lack of training ultimately amounts to a huge source of anxiety for these school leaders. The purpose of this study is to identify the critical financial competencies necessary for effective school leadership and provide guidelines for the practical restructuring of school finance courses in university-based preparation programs.

This study explores the historical development of the superintendency: teacher-scholar, business manager, statesman, applied social scientist, and effective communicator. It examines two critical functions of the superintendent: instructional leadership and school finance. It provides a historical overview of superintendent leadership preparation programs, examining program structure, content, faculty demographics and characteristics, certification requirements and standards, and professional development. This study identifies the specific school finance competencies practicing superintendents perceive as the most essential knowledge and skills that should be covered in university-based preparation programs.

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## **Chapter I: Introduction**

Since the creation of the superintendent, the roles and responsibilities of this position have continued to evolve over time (Callahan, 1966; Glass et al., 2000; Kowalski, 2005; Petersen et al., 2008; Kowalski & Brunner, 2011; Glass, 2006). As the Chief Executive Officer for the district, the superintendent is tasked with being both an instructional leader and managing the comprehensive operations of the school. These dual functions are under increased scrutiny partially due to the rising cost of education (Abshier et. al, 2011), public demands for transparency in the decision-making process, and policies that demand rigorous levels of accountability at all levels of education (Olivarez, 2013). These pressures contribute to the rapid and frequent turnover found among superintendents and highlights the need for improved preparation and support for these novice leaders (Lamkin, 2006).

Novice superintendents experience uncertainty and anxiety largely because practice in the superintendency is substantially different from their roles in the classroom and as principals (Glass et al., 2000; Petersen et al., 2008). The range of knowledge and skills that are necessary for successful entry into the superintendency are influenced by a variety of factors. There is wide variance in the standards used for certification in different states, and the demands of the job can vary greatly depending on the size and location of district, state laws, board relationships, and local fiscal responsibility and autonomy (Kowalski & Brunner, 2011).

Graduate programs in Educational Administration can be found in Colleges of Education across the country. Degrees from these programs train educators for a variety of positions outside of the classroom, both at the campus and district levels. There is a great deal of literature that has been written over the last several decades focusing on the preparation of campus principals and teachers (Cooper et al., 2002; Petersen et al., 2008, Perrone & Tucker, 2018).



This research may offer some explanation as to why a majority of these graduate preparation programs are largely focused on the principalship. While there are many studies on the superintendency itself, research focused on preparation programs and their relationship to problems of practice for novice superintendents is far less common (Cooper et al., 2002; Petersen et al., 2008). Given their importance as leaders of school districts, the lack of attention to superintendent preparation research is indicative of the challenges scholars face when trying to conceptualize the position (Cooper et al., 2002; Petersen et al., 2008).

One of the major challenges researchers face in connecting preparation to practice is the fact that there are so many different pathways towards the superintendency. Over half of the states allow some type of emergency license, a third of states allow alternative routes to licensure, and nine states have no licensing requirements at all (Feistritzer, 2003). Therefore, preparation for this position can end up taking many different forms depending on the state and the individual educators, who elect to extend their learning beyond the required master's degree can choose from a number of opportunities.

There is no national curriculum for superintendent education and university-based programs are becoming increasingly disparate (Kowalski, 2006; Kowalski et al., 2009; Kowalski & AASA, 2011). Many universities consider their Ph.D. and Ed.D. programs as preparation programs for superintendents, but very few contain coursework tailored specifically for that purpose (Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Kowalski & AASA, 2011). Creating a one-size-fits-all curriculum for a position that is always changing is like trying to hit a moving target.

Practicing superintendents consistently report that they wish they had more practical experience that connected the theory they studied in their preparation programs to real world situations (Tripses et al., 2015, Petersen et al., 2008). Given the breadth of responsibilities a

superintendent is tasked with, deciding how to prioritize what is taught in graduate programs versus left to learn on the job or through professional development is a complex challenge for university-based programs. Superintendent preparation programs need carefully examine how these different competencies are taught and placed in context so that novice superintendents are better prepared to tackle the demands of the position (Petersen et al., 2008).

### **Purpose of the Study**

While every superintendency comes with its own unique set of roles and responsibilities, a thorough understanding of all the concepts classified under the umbrella of school finance is essential to the success of school superintendents. This is evidenced in Texas Administrative Code §242.15 *Standards Required for the Superintendent Certificate*, which requires a superintendent should “facilitate the use and allocation of all available resources to support the implementation of the school district's vision and goals; apply legal concepts, regulations, and codes for school district operations; perform effective budget planning, management, account auditing, and monitoring and establish school district procedures for accurate and effective fiscal reporting; and acquire, allocate, and manage resources according to school district vision and priorities (TEA, 2018).” Therefore, the purpose of this study will be to analyze the perceptions of superintendents regarding their university-based preparation programs, and identify the specific school finance concepts and skills they feel are necessary to meet the professional needs of novice superintendents in the state of Texas.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The American Association of School Administrators’ decennial studies on the superintendency provide nearly one hundred years of research on superintendents and reveal that school leaders consider their role in school finance to be one of the most serious challenges they

face (Glass & Franceschini, 2007; Petersen et al. 2008; Glass et al., 2000). Superintendents are responsible for large amounts of public funds, budgeting, collecting taxes and other revenues, overseeing the day-to-day fiscal operations of the district, and reporting the financial status of the district in accordance with professional standards and state and federal statutes and regulations (Hartman & Stefkovich, 2005).

The scope of this responsibility amounts to a huge source of anxiety for superintendents (Hayes, 2001). This comes as no surprise with school district budgets ranging from hundreds of thousands to billions of dollars depending on the size and location of the school district. This is compounded by the fact that most superintendents do not have a background in money management or finance (Dlott, 2005). In medium and larger sized districts, the district may have the resources to hire a Chief Financial Officer (CFO) with knowledge and experience in state funding, taxes, or budgeting. However, in many smaller districts because the district cannot afford both, the superintendent may also serve as CFO. It is the responsibility of the superintendent to either acquire this knowledge or hire someone who has this knowledge (Abshier et. al, 2011). In every scenario, the superintendent is ultimately responsible for overseeing this function of the job and needs to have a solid foundation on which to lead the district.

No two states fund their public schools with the same funding formulas, and even within the same state, there can be different procedural mechanisms that are used (De Luca et. al, 2014). Since the management of school district finances is one of the major responsibilities of the superintendent, understanding both revenues and expenditures of this very complex equation is a necessity (Abshier et. al, 2011). With state funding formulas and regulations constantly changing, superintendents often have to rely on developing the knowledge and skills associated

with school finance management once they are hired. Due to the fact that school finance courses are just one single component of a broader superintendent preparation curriculum, it is imperative to determine which specific school finance competencies practicing superintendents identify as the most essential knowledge and skills that should be covered in university-based preparation programs.

### **Research Questions**

By answering the following questions, the results of this study will add to the growing body of research aimed at helping prepare superintendents for success as they take on their new roles.

1. What school finance knowledge and skills do superintendents perceive to be crucial components of university-based superintendent preparation program curriculum?
2. What are the perceptions of superintendents of how their preparation programs prepared them in the area of school finance?
3. What types of support in school finance do superintendents need in their first year?

### **Brief Overview of Methodology**

A narrative research methodology will be used to examine the perceptions of the participants and how their preparation has prepared them to fulfill the school finance roles and responsibilities required of a superintendent. This study will rely on interviews of superintendents to investigate their experiences in university-based preparation programs and offer suggestions for improvement (Creswell, 2007). The study will utilize the semi-structured interview protocol which will allow the participants to expand upon concepts unknown to the researcher (Siedman, 2013). Peer debriefing will be used with committee members to challenge the quality of the questions and to ensure the interview questions are both in line with the

research proposal and will elicit the information this research proposal is seeking (Patton, 2002; Creswell, 2007).

Texas Education Agency (TEA) performance data and Public Educational Information Management System (PEIMS) data will be used to select a purposeful sample of ten superintendent participants.

The criteria for selection will include the following:

- No more than five years elapsed since they completed a university-based preparation program
- Have completed Ph.D. or Ed.D. program or have completed all required coursework in their university-based preparation program.
- One to five years of experience as a superintendent in Texas to ensure responses are relevant to their university-based preparation and not their on-the-job training.
- At least five of the superintendents in the sample will work in small/rural sized districts.
- At least two of the superintendents in the sample will work in medium/suburban sized districts.

Data sources will primarily consist of interviews conducted between January 2019 and April 2019. The interview protocol will include questions about the novice superintendents' views on the applicability of the content provided in their school finance courses they completed as part of their university-based superintendent preparation program. Follow-up interviews will be completed as necessary. The data will be coded and used to offer suggestions on how school finance courses in university preparation programs might be modified to be more responsive to the needs of novice superintendents.

## **Conceptual Framework**

This study will explore the perceptions of novice superintendents of how their university-based preparation programs have prepared them for the responsibilities of the superintendency related to school finance. The 2018 National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) Program Recognition Standards and the TEA Chapter 242 Superintendent Certification Standards will be used as the conceptual framework to assist in constructing the interview questions as well as the basis for analyzing responses and developing recommendations for improvement. In an era of increasing accountability, the importance of clearly defining what successful performance looks like cannot be understated. The better a superintendent understands what excellence looks like, the greater their chances are for achieving or surpassing that standard (NPBEA, 2011). The ELCC and TEA standards represent the knowledge, skills, and practices intrinsic to district leadership that improve student learning. They define what a superintendent should know and be able to do as a result of completing a university-based preparation program.

## **Definition of Terms**

University-Based Preparation Program - Any combination of courses and/or requirements leading to a degree, certificate, major, or minor (Ingle et al., 2018). For the purpose of this study, university-based preparation programs will be generally defined as leadership preparation doctoral programs for superintendents that are operated by American colleges and universities. There are currently 55 Texas Education Agency-approved superintendent preparation programs in Texas.

Novice Superintendent – A superintendent who has no previous experience in the superintendency (Petersen, et al., 2008). For the purpose of this study, the population will include superintendents with one to five years of experience.

#### Framework of District Functions and Leadership Competencies of School

Superintendents- The leadership responsibilities of public school superintendents that encompass ten distinct, but overlapping, functions that provide definition to the ongoing activities of school districts. These functions are: (1) governance operations; (2) curriculum and instruction; (3) elementary and secondary campus operations; (4) instructional support services; (5) human resources; (6) administrative, finance, and business operations; (7) facilities planning and plant services; (8) accountability, information management, and technology services; (9) external and internal communications; and (10) operational support systems – safety and security, food services, and transportation (Olivarez, 2013).

School Finance- This includes the day-to-day operations that ensure the continued production of payroll, funds management, as well as the essential process of developing, monitoring, and evaluating budgets.

#### **Limitations**

The following elements of this proposal comprise the limitations of this study and may affect the conclusions drawn by the researcher. Due to the sample size of participants, the perceptions of the superintendents in this study may not reflect the broader sentiments of superintendents across the state. All of the superintendents in the study will be licensed and practicing in Texas which may further limit the ability to generalize the findings to other states. Given the history and funding formulas related to school finance that are unique to Texas, the

findings in this study may not be applicable to other university-based preparation programs in other states.

### **Assumptions**

Much of the data collected will rely on the memories of the participants in the study. It is assumed that the superintendents will be able to delineate the concepts learned as part of their university-based school finance preparation from the skills and concepts they have learned since beginning their new roles as superintendents. However, the reliance on having participants recall information they have previously learned may cause unintentional data to be included or excluded.

### **Significance of the Study**

School board members expect their future district leaders to be well-versed in all functions of the superintendency. This means that superintendents must be strong instructional leaders and communicators as well as being responsible for ensuring that financial, human, and material resources are directed toward achieving the school district's vision, mission, and goals (Tripses et. al, 2015). This purpose of this study will be to identify the critical financial competencies necessary for effective school leadership and provide guidelines for the practical restructuring of school finance courses in university-based preparation programs.

Finally, at a practical level, it will highlight implications for aspiring superintendents and their individual school finance preparation. Superintendents serving in districts with fewer resources may not be able to delegate responsibilities centered around school finance. With the information gathered from this study, aspiring superintendents who have already completed their superintendent preparation, may be able to identify personal areas of deficiency related to school



finance before they assume the role of superintendent, and supplement their knowledge with additional coursework or professional development.

## **Summary**

This study will be focused on the preparation of school superintendents and aims to determine if Texas school superintendents believe the school finance training they received in their university-based preparation programs has prepared them for the superintendency in relation to the Texas Administrative Code standards for superintendent certification and the 2011 ELCC District Level Standards. Additionally, this study will provide suggestions for improving the school finance information and skills covered in superintendent preparation programs based on the perceptions of practicing superintendents. Finally, the study will offer insights into the challenges faced by novice superintendents in the area of school finance and suggestions for improving their own professional knowledge.

Chapter I provided an introduction and background to the study. It included a statement of the problem, the purpose of the study and research questions, a brief overview of the methodology, conceptual framework, definitions of terms, limitations and delimitations of the study, assumptions made by the researcher, and the significance of the study. Chapter II will provide the rationale for the study by exploring the historical and current expectations of superintendents and include an examination of what the research says about university-based preparation programs. National superintendent standards and Texas licensing requirements will be examined in the context of the study.

## **Chapter II: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

The role of the superintendent has evolved alongside the American public education system since its creation in the nineteenth century, growing both in scope and complexity (Olivarez, 2013). A majority of those changes can be traced to the demands for education reform in public education over the last century and reflect the needs, values, and political conditions that were prevalent at the time (Callahan, 1966; Kowalski & Brunner, 2011). School boards and local governments have long struggled with deciding what the superintendent should be responsible for managing, and thus the roles and responsibilities have been in a constant state of evolution (Callahan, 1966; Kowalski & Brunner, 2011).

Since the 1980s, many of the responsibilities of the position have been defined by the push for increased accountability from federal and state governments in the form of various legislative initiatives such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), and Race to the Top (RTTP) (Grogan & Andrews, 2002). As this role has changed, it has highlighted some of the challenges university-based programs face in preparing and training aspiring superintendents for the responsibilities of the position (Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Petersen et al., 2008).

Superintendents generally report that they are satisfied with the quality of their education and how it has prepared them for the superintendency. However, while preparation programs have adapted their content and overall structure to address most current responsibilities, superintendents consistently report that they lack sufficient knowledge and skills necessary to navigate the field of public school finance. (Lamkin, 2006; Glass, 2006; Petersen et al., 2008). The researcher seeks to understand why superintendents consistently identify school finance as

one of the top areas of deficiency in their leadership training over the past century and why university-based preparation programs have struggled to address this need.

The purpose of this review of the literature is to explore the superintendency and the preparation programs tasked with providing aspiring leaders the knowledge and skills they need to be successful in their future positions. The literature review will begin by tracing the evolution of the roles and responsibilities associated with the superintendency. It will then examine the characteristics of university-based preparation programs that factor into the overall preparedness of a novice superintendent.

### **Literature Review**

Graduate programs in Educational Administration can be found in colleges of Education across the country. Degrees from these programs train educators for a variety of positions outside of the classroom, both at the campus and district levels. There is a great deal of literature that has been written over the last several decades focusing on the preparation of campus principals and teachers (Cooper et al., 2002; Petersen et al., 2008, Perrone & Tucker, 2018). This research may offer some explanation as to why a majority of these graduate preparation programs are largely focused on the principalship. While there are many studies on the superintendency itself, research focused on preparation programs and their relationship to problems of practice for novice superintendents is far less common (Cooper et al., 2002; Petersen et al., 2008). Given their importance as leaders of school districts, the lack of attention to superintendent preparation research is indicative of the challenges scholars face when trying to conceptualize the position (Cooper et al., 2002; Petersen et al., 2008).

One of the major challenges researchers face in connecting preparation to practice is the fact that there are so many different pathways towards the superintendency. Over half of the

states allow some type of emergency license, a third of states allow alternative routes to licensure, and nine states have no licensing requirements at all (Feistritzer, 2003). Therefore, preparation for this position can end up taking many different forms depending on the state requirements and the preference of the individuals seeking the licensure.

The lack of a national curriculum for superintendent education is causing university-based programs to become increasingly disparate (Kowalski, 2005; Kowalski et al., 2009; Kowalski & AASA, 2011). Many universities consider their Ph.D. and Ed.D. programs as preparation programs for superintendents, but very few contain coursework tailored specifically for that purpose (Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Kowalski & AASA, 2011). Developing a standard curriculum for a position that is always changing is like trying to hit a moving target. In order to understand the current roles and responsibilities of the superintendency so that preparation programs might better prepare future leaders, it's important to examine the historical context of how this position has evolved. Some of the basic issues that existed in education over a hundred years ago still exist in the modern world of today.

### **The Superintendency: A Historical Perspective**

Historian Raymond Callahan (1966) compiled one of the most prominent accounts of the evolution of the superintendent, concluding that four separate role conceptualizations of the school district superintendent had emerged prior to 1970: teacher-scholar, business manager, statesman, and applied social scientist. As America transitioned from manufacturing into the age of technology, Kowalski (2011) conceptualized a fifth role of the superintendent – the superintendent as an effective communicator. Although each role had been dominant at a specific point in history, Cuban (1976) suggested the emergence of new roles has not rendered the others irrelevant (as cited in Kowalski & Brunner, 2011). Instead, the position has continued

to become more complex, with scope of responsibilities and required skills of the superintendent continuing to grow over time.

The superintendency parallels the development of the public-school system (Callahan, 1966). Free, public, “common” schools were established in the 1830s and thus the first superintendencies (Callahan, 1966). Superintendents were hired by school boards to assist with the daily operations of the school and insure that state requirements were being met (Brunner, Grogan, & Björk, 2002). Superintendents were given limited authority over school administrators or teachers except as provided by the board. Instead, many of their responsibilities were more clerical in nature than the executive role we know today (Callahan, 1966).

The superintendent has operated as an agent of the school board since the inception of the position. The rapid growth of schools and inefficiency of having the school board make all business as well as instructional decisions would eventually become too difficult to manage. School boards gave up limited control over matters of instruction to the superintendent who was recognized as an “educational expert” (Callahan, 1966). The position would continue to evolve over several decades and it wasn’t until the 1865 that the role of the superintendent as we know it began to take shape (Callahan, 1966; Kowalski & Brunner, 2011).

### **Teacher-Scholar**

The first superintendents were not licensed administrators, but instead they were hired because of their success in the classroom and their knowledge of teaching pedagogy. They were the “teachers of teachers,” and their primary responsibility was overseeing instructional and learning processes, promoting the development of teacher pedagogy and student learning. As schools expanded, these teacher leaders eventually took responsibility for managing the day-to-

day operations of the school, which was focused on the implementation of the state curriculum, teacher supervision, and integrating students into society (Kowalski 2005; Callahan, 1966; Glass et al., 2000).

### **Business Manager**

Scientific business management models that were the driving force behind much of the industrial revolution began to shift the focus of superintendents around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Glass et al., 2000). As a result of booming industry, school enrollments were increasing rapidly. This growth prompted school boards to begin relegating business management autonomy of the school district to the superintendent, while the school board became more of a policy-making body that would meet periodically (Glass et al., 2000). This was a stark contrast to previous distributions of power between the superintendent and the school board.

Pressures from outside business groups helped shift the principal responsibility of the superintendent to business manager or school executive. Even as the growth of schools necessitated changes in structure, school boards were reluctant to make these changes due to concerns that the superintendent would not be able to manage business of running a district while still providing instructional leadership (Callahan, 1966; Kowalski & Brunner, 2011). This transition of responsibility did not happen overnight, but states began to address this issue into statute, it helped clarify the responsibilities of the two parties (Callahan, 1966; Kowalski & Brunner, 2011).

### **Democratic-Political Leader**

The primary role of the superintendent as a business manager lasted approximately twenty years (Callahan, 1966). Beginning in 1929, the primary role of the superintendency became more political in nature. Competition between schools and other public agencies

intensified as available resources became scarcer, forcing superintendents to serve as lobbyists and political strategists in order to galvanize support and funding for district initiatives (Björk et al., 2014). As the leader of the district, the superintendent was not only responsible for functioning as an instructional leader and managing the finances of the district, but now they were also responsible for maintaining relationships with stakeholders throughout the broader school community (Callahan, 1966; Kowalski & Brunner, 2011). Howlett (1993) contended that there were obvious political implications for the responsibility of galvanizing support for schools in the community (as cited in Kowalski, 2011).

Lack of trust due to corruption and dishonesty in other professions eventually bled into the public's perception of the reputation of the superintendent. As the sole person in charge, the superintendent was extremely visible and an easy target, both personally and on behalf of their districts (Glass et al., 2000). The prevailing thought at the time was that the "expert" superintendent had become so distracted with their role as a political leader that they were not doing their part to help schools continue to grow and evolve (Callahan, 1966).

### **Applied Social Scientist**

Societal influences and pressures from within the school community created a demand for yet another change in the superintendency. School administration was becoming an established academic discipline equal to that of business management and other public administrative disciplines (Callahan, 1966). Educational scholars began to understand that there were a multitude of factors that affected the decision-making process of superintendents and critics argued that earlier conceptions of the superintendent ignored the realities of practice (Kowalski & Brunner, 2011). As an applied scientist, the superintendent utilized the concepts of psychology, sociology, economics, and scientific inquiry to make decisions (Kowalski, 2005).

As this role developed, the preparation of superintendents became less practice-based and more theoretical (Kowalski & AASA 2011).

### **Effective Communicator**

The education reform movement of the 1980s advocated for increased accountability and shifted the primary role of the superintendent once again. As a result of the landmark *A Nation at Risk* study, there was an increased focus on school district accountability with regard to student achievement (Grogan & Andrews, 2002). This movement represented a shift in the public expectation for what the standards should be for student learning and achievement. School districts experimented with the structure of the school day. Teacher certification requirements began to be established and the decision-making process shifted from the central office to the individual campuses, thus taking the role of the superintendent back to one of oversight. As a result of this separation, the responsibilities of the superintendency included both functioning as an instructional leader, and communicating the work surrounding these reforms in order to garner community support (Grogan & Andrews, 2002).

The restructuring movement surfaced in the 1990s and was defined by the superintendent being asked to relinquish much of their administrative responsibility to the building principals (Grogan & Andrews, 2002). Many school boards promoted autonomy through the role of the principal for operations and curriculum. This was largely driven by the public perception that autocracy was ruining the education of children. By the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, legislatures were holding the superintendent more and more responsible for student achievement, focusing the public eye on instructional methods and student learning. Rather than just carrying out legislative mandates, superintendents were responsible for identifying the actual needs of the



schools and working with a community of stakeholders to create solutions (Kowalski & AASA, 2011).

### **Critical Functions: Instructional Leadership and School Finance**

The role of the superintendent has undergone significant changes since its inception, each era adding to the complexity of the position. Once considered to simply be a “teacher of teachers”, the superintendent has increasingly been defined by their responses to the challenges of political pressures, conflicting interests, unpredictable finances, and greater demands for accountability (Bredeson & Kose, 2007; Olivarez 2013). Ultimately, as the primary instructional leader for the school district, the superintendent is responsible for improving student achievement (Kowalski, 2013). It is a highly situational position, largely influenced by school boards and a host of outside variables (Cuban, 1976; Glass 2006). School board members expect their future superintendents to be "well-versed in all aspects of the job" (Tripses et al., 2015), not just serving as an instructional leader, but proficient in all ten functions of the superintendency (Olivarez, 2013). While most districts possess central office staff who may oversee many of these specific functions, the proper management of resources is imperative for the success of the superintendent (Glass et al., 2000). Support for the conceptualization of superintendent as business executive has diminished over time, but educators and policymakers concur that effective administrators have to be both managers and leaders in order to be effective (Kowalski & Brunner, 2011; Glass, 2006).

Hersey & Blanchard (1988) argue that leadership is about recognizing the needs of the entire school district and the attempts to influence it in a certain direction, but management is what it takes to accomplish that task (as cited in Glass, 2006). A school district can survive a

lack of leadership, but you are unlikely to find examples of successful districts unable to manage their budget, facilities, personnel, or curriculum.

The efficient and appropriate management of public tax dollars is one of the primary responsibilities of superintendents regardless of the size of the district (Glass et al., 2000). This is an incredibly complex and time-consuming task that requires both skills and experience not learned as principal or building-level administrator. Most superintendents are hired for their curriculum expertise and not for their ability to manage billion dollar budgets (Glass, 2006). The finances of a school district have a direct impact on nearly every aspect (budgeting, accounting, debt management, investing, purchasing, property management, salaries, facilities, human resources, payroll, benefits, contracts, etc.) of a school district and the oversight of these resources is the most common reason superintendents are dismissed (Glass et al., 2000).

The superintendent's role with the different areas of school finance can vary greatly across the country. The level of involvement in any of these areas is primarily determined by district size and has little to do with prior training or personal inclination. In smaller districts, the knowledge of school finance may be even more critical for the superintendent because there may not be resources available to hire support staff (Kowalski et al., 2009). Larger districts may be able to hire experts in school finance, but superintendents still have to possess enough understanding and expertise to be able to assess whether or not these resources are being managed effectively. The breadth of responsibilities that a superintendent is responsible for highlights the importance of high quality leadership preparation programs, which are an essential component in helping aspiring administrators develop the knowledge and skills they need to lead our nation's school systems (Hackman et al., 2009).

## Superintendent Leadership Preparation Programs

### Historical Overview

While the roles of the superintendency have evolved over time, the history of preparation programs is relatively short compared with other professions such as law, medicine, and dentistry (Glass et al., 2000). The knowledge required to successfully serve in this position has evolved as the primary roles and responsibilities of the superintendent have shifted from being a teacher-scholar, business manager, statesman, social scientist, and most recently as a communicator. Increased diversity in student populations and the public expectation that schools provide personalized learning experiences preparing students for both college and career readiness highlights the importance of superintendents being prepared within the context of well-designed leadership programs (Olivarez, 2013).

It was not until the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century that reformers and scholars began to focus on preparation programs. Concern over the quality of public education triggered one of the most sustained efforts to improve public education in history. The publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 was inspired by concerns over equity and the inability of industry to compete in world markets because of the low knowledge and skill levels of high school graduates (Glass et al., 2000). As the standards-based reform movement took hold, there was a concentrated focus on improving classroom instruction and programming. Many states had adopted laws and policies requiring preparatory programs and licensure for the superintendency (Kowalski et al., 2009). This also led to the increased scrutiny and criticism of the field of educational leadership and launched the debate over how the next generation of school leaders should be prepared (Glass et al., 2000; Levine, 2005).

Numerous studies have made the connection between strong instructional leadership and the overall success of students (Leithwood et al., 2004, Marzano & Waters, 2009; Buttram, 2014). These findings have prompted the need for examining best practices in preparation programs in an effort connect the effectiveness of these programs to student performance in schools (Jackson & Kelly, 2002; Orr, 2006; Southern Regional Education Board, 2005; Buttram, 2014). Some scholars contend that while there are indeed problems with preparation programs, the situation isn't as critical as it is painted in reports (Hoyle & Torres, 2007). These claims are supported by a majority of graduates who report that they are pleased overall with their leadership preparation and it has provided them with useful information relevant to their role as a superintendent (Cooper et al., 2002; Hoyle & Torres, 2007; Petersen et al., 2008; Kowalski & Brunner, 2011).

The preparation of superintendents is a critical component of education reform, but it is full of challenges including synchronizing preparation and practice, connecting theory to practice, developing an adequate knowledge base (Cooper et al., 2002). Reports by national associations and task forces have examined the nature and content of preparation programs and found that most programs did not offer comprehensive and coherent sequences of courses (Glass, 2006). Instead, Milstein (1993) argues they appeared to be comprised of sequences of separate and disconnected courses that gave little thought to closing the theory-practice gap and aligning content with desired outcomes (as cited in Glass, 2006). Other criticisms include low academic admission standards, an indifference towards instructional leadership, a disjunction between theory and practice, inattention to practice-based research, inadequate knowledge base, treating superintendent preparation as an extension of principal preparation, and considering a doctorate

in educational administration the equivalent of superintendent preparation (Kowalski & AASA, 2011).

These findings have prompted calls for significant changes in the approach to superintendent preparation. But change has come slowly. Despite attacks from both outside and inside preparation programs, most doctoral educational leadership programs do not look substantially different than they did in the past (McCarthy, 1999b, Phillips, 2013; Buttram, 2014). More research is needed to identify best practices in different aspects of leadership preparation programs. Without this information, it is difficult to advocate for one approach over the other.

### **Program Structure**

Superintendents typically enter the profession after completing an academic program or licensing program that includes a written examination qualifying them for state licensure (Glass, 2006). Because each state sets their own licensing, there is a great deal of variance that exists across states in such areas as required degrees, required credit hours, program content, and years of experience required for both teaching and administration. Historically, most superintendent programs have been university-based and administrators have entered the profession through earning academic degrees and state certifications (Glass et al., 2000).

There are approximately 600 educational administration programs in the nation, although not all of them have superintendent preparation programs (Kowalski & Brunner, 2011). While they are similar in many ways, there is much variation in their curriculum, course content, degree requirements, and academic rigor. Many of these variations can be explained by the dissimilar missions among research institutions, doctoral granting institutions, and comprehensive campuses that deliver this information. Research institutions may place a higher value on the

professional knowledge base to inform school and district leadership through individual research and theory, while comprehensive institutions may tend to embrace specific models of students such as cohorts while stressing technical knowledge based on personal experience related to practice (Glass et al., 2000).

There have been numerous studies identifying the cohort-based model as the best practice in organizing leadership preparation programs (Peterson & Barnett (2005); Basom et al., 1996 as cited in Buttram, 2014; Robicheau & Haar, 2008). In this model, students are set up to take all or most of their courses together. They can be intentionally placed in groups, but scheduling, prescribed course requirements, and other factors can also create situations where most of the same students end up with the same schedule. Although this model can be more expensive to operate, students benefit from camaraderie, peer support, and networking. Consistent with much of this research, a majority of programs are currently utilizing or moving to this model (Buttram, 2014).

Internships are a critical component of superintendent preparation and provide opportunities for students to gain experience prior to their first jobs. Unlike other graduate fields of study in education, most doctoral students in leadership preparation programs already have experience both in the classroom and as administrators. Some critics argue that internships should play a stronger role in leadership preparation programs and state licensing requirements are beginning to reflect that criticism (Browne-Ferrigno, 2004 as cited in Buttram, 2014).

Chapter 242 of the Texas Administrative Code (TAC) mandates that superintendents complete at least 160 hours in a field-based practicum where they must demonstrate proficiency in each of the superintendent standards (TEA, n.d.). Additionally, novice superintendents in Texas and

those new to the state must also participate in a one-year mentorship that includes regular contact with an experienced superintendent.

### **Program Content**

The criteria for licensure in different states typically drives the program content offered in preparation programs and dictates the credit requirements in different programs (Kowalski & Brunner, 2011; Glass et al., 2000). Analyzing program content is extremely challenging because of the diversity in how courses are titled, the actual content, and the level of difficulty from one course to another (Buttram, 2014). The absence of a national standard curriculum makes it considerably more challenging to develop a national licensing criteria (Petersen et al., 2008). The lack of a standard is also one of the primary reasons there has been an increase in the number of academic programs over the last several decades as many programs see this as an opportunity for growth (Kowalski & Brunner, 2011).

Across the board, most superintendent preparation programs offer similar courses in school administration, finance, personnel, organizational theory, school law, and school-community relations (Glass et al., 2000; Kowalski & Brunner, 2011). The titles of these courses have not changed significantly over the last several decades although the specific content and course emphasis may be updated as individual faculty strive to reflect changes in the field. Some programs also require a field-based internship, but there is no national curriculum for superintendent preparation that currently exists.

After getting into the job, novice superintendents perceived school law, school finance, and school public relations to be the three courses that were of the greatest importance in their daily practice (Kowalski & Brunner, 2011; Kowalski et al. 2009; Bratlein & Walters, 1999). However, when asked for ways to improve preparation programs, they also identified additional

content in the same three areas as having the most potential to make a positive impact on their individual preparation. This suggests the need for additional coursework in these areas, highlighting some of the challenges that superintendents most often face (Kowalski, 2011).

### **Faculty Demographics**

High quality university-based preparation programs are an essential component for helping administrators learn the skills and knowledge they will need to lead schools and districts of the future (Hackmann et al., 2009). What defines the quality of these programs is not necessarily the title of the courses in the degree plans, but instead the leadership of the faculty members teaching these courses. Attracting and retaining high quality faculty is important to the life and productivity of programs (Ingle, 2018). Just as research has identified the connection between school leaders and student performance, Hackmann (2009) argues that the characteristics and qualifications of the faculty members in these programs has a direct impact on the overall quality of the program. These faculty are “ultimately the principal designers and deliverers of those programs, and themselves provide the research base for what is taught in their own as well as other programs in educational administration” (Baker et al., 2007 as cited in Hackmann (2009)).

Preparation programs typically rely on a small number of faculty members comprised of full-time tenure-line professors, full-time clinical faculty members, and part-time adjunct instructors (Hackmann et al., 2009). The amount of their experience as school administrators in the field has fluctuated over the last several decades due to pressure from the reform movement. Before the 1960s a majority of faculty joined preparation programs at the end of their careers. Many of these faculty had little interest in theory and research and taught using personal experiences (McCarthy, 1999). The reform movements of the 1980s pushed for changes in



hiring practices and the result was that university programs saw a marked decrease in the number of faculty with school administrator experience. As various organizations and associations recognized the need to address problems of practice, the pendulum would shift back towards a preference for hiring faculty with administrator experience in the 1990s (Glass et al., 2000).

The ideal educational leadership professor holds a doctoral degree in educational leadership, has served as an administrator, is a productive researcher and scholar, is an excellent teacher, and works throughout the community to maintain an understanding of the current issues facing schools (Hackmann & McCarthy, 2011; Levine, 2005). The weight of these responsibilities may vary greatly depending on the type of institution as well as the qualifications of the other faculty in the program. While research institutions often place a great deal of value on faculty research and publications, non-research institutions may place a higher value on successful school administrative experience, often focusing on the field-based aspects of leadership preparation, teaching courses, and with few expectations for faculty to engage in scholarly research (Hackmann & McCarthy, 2011).

The background and credentials of the faculty leading these preparation programs has long been a source of scrutiny and criticism. Some of these concerns cite a lack of successful administrative experience, and the absence of recent experience. Some have also claimed that professors are inadequately trained to conduct research (Levine, 2005; McCarthy, 1999; Rowan & Miskel, 1998). Yet many of these criticisms rely on anecdotal information, and there is not a significant amount of research that exists concerning tenure-line educational faculty (Hackmann et al., 2017). Contrary to reports critical of university-based programs, novice superintendents are overwhelmingly satisfied with the quality of the faculty in their preparation programs. More than three-fourths agree that their professors set high standards for their students, integrate

relevant course material, understand the practical challenges facing superintendents, and are able to connect theory and practice (Kowalski & Brunner, 2011).

### **Faculty Characteristics**

Many of the criticisms of educational leadership faculty stems from a shift in focus that occurred around the 1950's when the educational administration field began to separate into researchers and practitioners. Critics of faculty at the time claimed that these instructors were drawing primarily on their individual administrative experience when teaching and did not have enough experience with theory and current research (Hackmann, 2017).

Preparation program faculty have generally maintained a balance between individuals holding the PhD and EdD degrees (Hackmann et al., 2017). Historically, two-thirds of faculty members have earned a doctoral degree in educational administration with other majors in the field of education, such as curriculum and instruction and special education, commonly reported (Hackman & McCarthy, 2011). The types of institutions where faculty have earned those degrees have shifted over time. In the 1960s, nearly half of the educational leadership faculty earned their degree from one of only twenty research universities.

An effort to elevate the field peaked in the 1980s, when discipline-based scholars trained in political science, economics, and law, but with little or no practical experience were favored for employment over former school administrators (McCarthy, 1999). However, critics argued that leadership preparation programs were disconnected from the realities of school leadership, failing to link preparation and practice, and suggesting that research and practice were complimentary instead of mutually exclusive (Glass et al., 2000). This would lead to continued changes and by 2008, the number of educational leadership faculty earning their degree from a research university had risen to nearly 90% (Hackmann et al., 2017).

The percentage of faculty with prior experience in school administration has also changed over time, largely coinciding with the more recent calls for school leadership faculty to be able to enhance the relevance of their instruction by incorporating their own leadership perspectives and experiences into learning activities. After peaking at 90% in 1965, the percentage of those with school administrative experience dropped to 33% in 1994 before increasing back to 67% in 2008 (Hackmann & McCarthy, 2011; Glass et al., 2000). While the trend is positive for addressing the previously identified problems of practice, leadership preparation faculty have also been criticized in comprehensive institutions are being unprepared to conduct and supervise research (Orr, 2006). Because the number of doctoral degrees being awarded are increasingly coming from comprehensive institutions where only a fifth of faculty identify research as a strength (Hackmann et al., 2017), it is likely that over time that this will lead to a cycle of future faculty with far less capacity to conduct quality research (Baker et al., 2007).

### **Certification Requirements and Standards**

There have been many reports that have been critical of university-based preparation programs over the last several decades that have prompted significant changes for school administrators. Preparation programs offer a variety of certification and licenses depending on state requirements (Buttram, 2014). While much of the research focus has been on improving school leadership, the requirements for superintendent certification have also seen some significant changes (Kowalski et al., 2009). Nine states no longer require a license for this position and over half of the remaining states grant waivers, emergency licenses, or sanction alternative routes to licensure (Feistritzer, 2003 in Kowalski et al., 2009). There have even been several recommendations to make administrative licensing voluntary across all states (e.g., Broad

Foundation and Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2003; Hess, 2003) and to completely discontinue doctoral programs for practitioners (e.g., Levine, 2005).

The Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards are used to guide preparation and licensure requirements for superintendents, shifting the focus from administration to leadership and student learning (Glass et al., 2000). They were developed through consultation with practicing school leaders, educational leadership faculty, and professional association representatives. They integrate the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) performance standards and National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) standards for school administrators to help states dictate the structure and content of their educational administration programs (Glass et al., 2000). Because there are no national licensing requirements, different states use these in various ways to help draft their administrator and teacher codes.

The six ISLLC standards for district administrators focus on developing a shared vision, creating cultures that support student learning; ensuring safe, efficient, and effective learning; collaborating with the broad community; acting in a fair and ethical fashion; and understanding the socio-economic, legal, political, and cultural contexts in which schools are embedded (Glass et al., 2000; NPBEA, 2018) They are intended to influence changes in educational leadership programming, course content, instructional strategies, and clinical experiences. In addition to establishing a national standard, the ISLLC initiative aims to eliminate some of the barriers that keep licensed and experienced school leaders from moving among states (Glass et al., 2000).

Several states currently have or are considering ways to certify administrators who have backgrounds in fields other than education. While this is more frequently seen with teachers, this practice is less common with school-level administrators because almost all states require

future principals to be experienced, certified teachers. Many states allow districts to apply for a certification or licensure waiver for those persons assumed to have the requisite management experience. The last decennial national study of the superintendency found that almost 95% of superintendents had a valid state license and 85% had completed an accredited university designed to prepare superintendents (Kowalski & Brunner, 2011).

### **Professional Development**

There is no amount of coursework or preparation that will completely prepare a novice superintendent for success in all varieties of districts. Professional development is an important part of the continuing education of a superintendent. Many novice superintendents quickly discover that their new role is different from previous administrative positions they have held (Glass et al., 2000; Kowalski, 2005). Even after earning their graduate degree and being licensed, superintendents frequently engage in professional learning in order to meet the demands of the job and satisfy license renewal requirements (Kowalski & Brunner, 2011; Glass et al., 2000). Even if one could learn everything related to the superintendency through a university program or as they progressed up the career ladder, they would still not be prepared for the challenges of the future (Glass et al., 2000).

Both research and practice have shown that one key to enhancing leadership capacity is ongoing professional development (Petersen et al., 2009). There are many opportunities including professional organizations, state departments of education, regional service centers, and universities. State superintendent associations, such as the Texas Association of School Administrators, and state education agencies, such as the Texas Education Agency (TEA), are two of the biggest providers of professional development regardless of school district size (Kowalski & Brunner, 2011). Legal issues, finance, and personnel management are consistently

rated as three of the most relevant topics for continuing education. While there is no doubt that superintendents have benefited from coursework focused on theory or organization, these topics lend themselves to the everyday demands and responsibilities of the job (Kowalski & Brunner, 2011).

## **Summary**

Since the creation of the superintendent, the roles and responsibilities of this position have continued to evolve over time (Callahan, 1966; Glass et al., 2000; Kowalski, 2005; Petersen et al., 2008; Kowalski & Brunner, 2011; Glass, 2006). As the Chief Executive Officer for the district, the superintendent is tasked with being both an instructional leader and managing the comprehensive operations of the school. These dual roles are under increased public scrutiny partially due to the rising cost of education (Abshier et. al, 2011). This pressure contributes to the rapid and frequent turnover found among superintendents, and highlights need for improved preparation and support for these novice leaders (Lamkin, 2006).

Novice superintendents experience uncertainty and anxiety largely because practice in the superintendency is substantially different from their roles in the classroom and as principals (Glass et al., 2000; Petersen et al., 2008). The range of knowledge and skills that are necessary for successful entry into the superintendency are influenced by a variety of factors. There is wide variance in the standards used for certification in different states, and the demands of the job can vary greatly depending on the size and location of district, state laws, board relationships, and local fiscal responsibility and autonomy (Kowalski & Brunner, 2011).

Practicing superintendents consistently report that they wish they had more practical experience that connected the theory they studied in their preparation programs to real world situations (Tripses et al., 2015, Petersen et al., 2008). Given the breadth of responsibilities a

superintendent is tasked with, deciding how to prioritize what is taught in graduate programs versus left to learn on the job or through professional development is a complex challenge for university-based programs. Additional research is needed as superintendent preparation programs need to carefully examine how these different competencies are taught and placed in context so that novice superintendents are better prepared to tackle the demands of the position (Petersen et al., 2008).

The American Association of School Administrators' decennial studies on the superintendency provide nearly one hundred years of research on superintendents and reveal that school leaders consider their role in school finance to be one of the most serious challenges they continue to face (Glass & Franceschini, 2007; Petersen et al. 2008; Glass et al., 2000). While superintendents rightfully view instructional leadership and improving student achievement as an important part of their jobs, managerial and political issues often consume a majority of their time (Bredeson & Kose, 2007). The research from practicing superintendents appears to indicate a mismatch between policy mandates and initiatives and the daily realities of their work.

Superintendents are responsible for large amounts of public funds, budgeting, collecting taxes and other revenues, overseeing the day-to-day fiscal operations of their districts, and reporting the financial status of the district in accordance with professional standards and state and federal statutes and regulations (Hartman & Stefkovich, 2005 as cited in Abshier et al., 2011). The fact that school finance has been identified as an area where superintendents struggle the most and feel the least prepared for nearly a century of research highlights the complexity of the subject area and the challenge that university-based preparation program face when preparing future district leaders.

The scope of this job responsibility amounts to a huge source of anxiety for superintendents (Hayes, 2001 as cited in Abshier et al., 2011). This anxiety is compounded by the fact that most superintendents do not have a background in money management or finance and assume the position only having had minimal training in the field (Dlott, 2005). This comes as no surprise with school district budgets ranging from hundreds of thousands to billions of dollars depending on the size and location of the school district.

In medium- and larger-sized districts, the district may have the resources to hire a Chief Financial Officer (CFO) with knowledge and experience in state funding, taxes, or budgeting. However, in many smaller districts, because the district cannot afford both, the superintendent may also serve as CFO. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the superintendent to either acquire this knowledge or hire someone who has this knowledge (Abshier et. al, 2011). In all scenarios, the superintendent is ultimately responsible for overseeing this function of the job and needs to have a solid school finance foundation on which to lead the district.

While every superintendency comes with its own unique set of roles and responsibilities, a thorough understanding of all the concepts classified under the umbrella of school finance is essential to the success of school superintendents in every district. With superintendents continuing to identify school finance as an area where they struggle, a better understanding of the demands specific school finance issues place on superintendency may provide university-based preparation programs with information as to how they can provide the school finance education superintendents need to be successful.

This review of the literature suggests that many studies that have explored the roles and traced the development of the superintendency. From its humble beginning as a “teacher of teachers”, the role of the superintendency has grown increasingly demanding. Initially only



challenging school district leaders to demonstrate mastery of instructional leadership, superintendents have gradually taken on additional responsibilities that encompass every aspect running a school district. While the primary goal of the superintendent continues to be focused on improving student achievement, superintendent preparation programs have struggled to conceptualize how to address many of the problems of practice that superintendents face.

Despite decades of research indicating that superintendents continue to struggle with issues related to school finance, university-based leadership preparation programs have remained largely unchanged. Many of these programs continue to serve the dual purpose of preparing leaders to serve as both as building principals and as superintendents with the content remaining largely unchanged between the two tracks. Given the scope of unique knowledge and skills these programs are tasked with teaching superintendents, it is an understandably difficult challenge to prioritize the concepts that should be covered. While superintendents seem generally pleased with what they have been taught, it is clear from the existing literature that more research is needed to identify some of the specific financial competencies that should be included in university coursework and demonstrate how those translate into practice.

## **Chapter III – Methodology and Procedures**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the methodology and procedures related to narrative research. This chapter includes the research method and design, the population, the instruments for data collection, the data collection procedures, and the data analysis procedures.

The purpose of this study is to determine the perceptions of superintendents regarding their school finance preparation pre-service, and to identify the specific school finance concepts and skills they feel are necessary to meet the professional needs of novice superintendents in the state of Texas. The study answers the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions of superintendents of how their preparation programs prepared them in the area of school finance?
2. What school finance knowledge and skills do superintendents perceive to be crucial components of university-based superintendent preparation program curriculum?
3. What types of support in school finance do superintendents need in their first year?

### **Methodology**

Given the limited amount of time available for university-based preparation programs to impart the knowledge and skills necessary for success as a superintendent, this researcher believes that it is important to investigate the connections between the theory taught at the university level and practice in the field. By surveying novice superintendents and learning their perspectives on their school finance training and its applicability to their current roles and responsibilities, this research provides insights into how university-based school finance training can be improved for aspiring superintendents. Because these insights are largely based on the unique experiences of superintendents, both as learners and practitioners in their new roles, this

research examines the connections between theory and practice using an interpretivist framework.

Interpretivism emphasizes socially constructed realities, local generalizations, stocks of knowledge, and practical reasoning representing multiple perspectives (Denzin, 1994). What we know is not passively received from authoritative sources, but constructed by individuals or groups making sense of their experiential world (Maclellan & Soden, 2004). This research study is based on the belief that the experiences of novice superintendents in their new positions are a crucial component of helping define what school finance education should look like.

Seeking to understand the experiences of novice superintendents lends itself to qualitative research design. Qualitative research is often described as holistic approach concerned with exploring phenomenon from the inside and using the perspectives and accounts of participants as a starting point (Flick, 2009). Instead of focusing on “how many”, this type of research focuses on the “why” and “how”. Creswell (2013) argues that qualitative research should be used when we want to better understand the context or settings of a problem or issue from an individual perspective. The experiences of the participants provided valuable insights into how school finance education can be narrowed down to a manageable focus in university-based preparation programs.

This study uses the Texas Education Agency (TEA) Chapter 242 Superintendent Certification Standards as the conceptual framework for constructing the interview protocol and analyzing the data. The TEA standards represent the knowledge, skills, and practices intrinsic to district leadership that improve student learning (TEA, 2018). The standards define what a superintendent should know and be able to do as a result of completing a university-based preparation program.

Texas Administrative Code §242.15 *Standards Required for the Superintendent*

*Certificate* requires a superintendent should be able to:

facilitate the use and allocation of all available resources to support the implementation of the school district's vision and goals; apply legal concepts, regulations, and codes for school district operations; perform effective budget planning, management, account auditing, and monitoring and establish school district procedures for accurate and effective fiscal reporting; and acquire, allocate, and manage resources according to school district vision and priorities (TEA, 2018).

### **Research Design**

This study relies on interviews with novice superintendents to determine their perceptions of the specific school finance concepts and skills they feel are necessary to meet the professional needs of novice superintendents in the state of Texas. The qualitative research study utilizes a narrative research methodology. Narrative research is focused on how individuals assign meaning to their experiences through the stories they tell (Moen, 2006; Creswell, 2013). These stories are shaped by the knowledge, experiences, values, and feelings of the persons who are telling them (Moen, 2006). Creswell (2013) notes that this is the best approach when the researcher aims to capture the life experiences of a small number of individuals. The researcher used this approach to investigate the experiences of novice superintendents as they transitioned from students to practitioners.

### **Population and Sample**

Purposeful selection is used to select individuals who are particularly relevant to your questions and goals (Maxwell, 2013). In a qualitative study, the representation of participants

should be reflective of the potential number of participants (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). In order to broaden the range of perspectives to be more reflective of superintendents in Texas, the sample in this study includes a broad range of district sizes and superintendent responsibilities.

The study sample is comprised of superintendents who are new to the superintendency and have recently completed a university-based preparation program. Texas Education Agency (TEA) performance data and Public Educational Information Management System (PEIMS) data will be used to select a purposeful sample of ten novice superintendent participants. The criteria for eligibility to participate includes the following:

- No more than five years elapsed since they completed a university-based preparation program
- Have completed Ph.D. or Ed.D. program or have completed all required coursework in their university-based preparation program.
- One to five years of experience as a superintendent in Texas to ensure responses are relevant to their university-based preparation and not their on-the-job training.
- At least five of ten superintendents in the sample will work in small/rural sized districts.
- At least two of ten superintendents in the sample will work in medium/suburban sized districts.

### **Description of Data Collection Instrument**

A brief demographic survey was created by the researcher for the purpose identifying eligible superintendents who meet selection criteria to participate in the study and to help ensure the study includes a representative sample of participants (see Appendix A). The self-developed survey contained a short description of the purpose of the research and fifteen multiple-choice questions. It was sent to all eligible participants via email in the form of an online survey.

Interviews of novice superintendents were the main method used to investigate the study using the semi-structured interview protocol. Semi-structured interviews allow for more of a conversation between the researcher and participants and allow the participants to expand upon concepts unknown to the researcher (Siedman, 2013). Questions were focused on identifying the key aspects of school finance education that would have helped them transition into their new roles. Given that the researcher does not have any experience in dealing with school finance at the superintendent level, it was important to leave room for flexibility in the interview process.

An interview protocol was created by researcher for the purpose of this study (see Appendix B). Even though the research followed a semi-structured format, the interview protocol helped ensure that there was consistency between each of the interviews (Creswell, 2013). The interview protocol contains fifteen open-ended questions focused on gaining the perspectives of novice superintendents on their school finance training, their suggestions for improvements, if any, and ways that novice superintendents supplement their previous coursework with professional development.

The participant survey focused on the perceptions of their job preparedness in the areas of school finance relative to their experiences in a university-based preparation program. By having a clear understanding of what specific knowledge and skills a novice superintendent should have mastery of, both on paper and in practice, the greater the chance that university-based preparation programs will be able to prepare aspiring superintendents for success in their new roles.

### **Pilot Testing**

Peer debriefing was used with university faculty members with school finance experience to challenge the quality of the questions and to ensure the interview questions were

both in line with the research proposal and would elicit the information this research proposal was seeking (Patton, 2002; Creswell, 2007). Once the questions were vetted by university faculty and the researcher, the interview protocol was pilot tested with three Texas superintendents, each of which have at least five years of experience as a superintendent. In addition to making sure the questions are in alignment with the purpose of the study, superintendents in the pilot were asked to identify any additional aspects of school finance that have impacted their jobs and might be relevant to the study.

Both university faculty and superintendents have a vested interest in ensuring superintendents are receiving the requisite knowledge and skills necessary to perform the duties of the superintendency. The success of students who graduate from universities is often seen as a reflection of the quality of their preparation. Graduates of these programs also go on to serve alongside and with current practicing superintendents and need to receive the knowledge and skills required to serve in these positions. By vetting the questions through university school finance faculty as well as practicing superintendents, the researcher believes that this process increased both the reliability and validity of the questions in the study.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The researcher was an observer in this study. The researcher has experience as a teacher, school administrator, and as a student in a university-based preparation program leading towards superintendent licensure in the state of Texas. The researcher has also previously completed coursework in school finance.

In phenomenology, the researcher suspends past knowledge in order to fully grasp a phenomenon and opens up to new perspectives that may differ from their own experiences. (Merleau-Ponty, 1956). Bracketing is a process of setting aside one's beliefs, feelings, and

perceptions in order to be more open to different viewpoints (Streubert & Carpenter, 1999). As a researcher with previous experience in school finance education, it was necessary to acknowledge and attempt to bracket those previous experiences.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Following approval from the committee, the researcher applied for approval from the University of Texas IRB to study human subjects. Consent from the subjects was obtained prior to interviewing participants by the completion of the Informed Consent Form. Member checking was utilized in an effort to ensure trustworthiness of the data being collected. Participants were asked both during the interview and afterwards to clarify statements and to provide information that may have been left out through the interview process (Creswell, 1998). Every participant received a copy of the transcript from their interview. The final part of the interview protocol provided the interviewees an opportunity to reflect on the findings and offer any clarifications or additional insights they felt should be included as part of the survey.

This study primarily relied on interviews with superintendents to gather data. TEA PEIMS databases were used to identify a pool of possible participants. Emails containing the purpose of and information about the survey were sent out to everyone who met the participant inclusion criteria (see Appendix E). The survey was administered online via a link in the email. Ten superintendent respondents were randomly selected and invited to participate in an interview based on the selection criteria. If there aren't enough responses to meet the population criteria, it was determined that the researcher would follow-up by email and/or phone.

The interviews were originally planned to be completed between January 2019 and April 2019. Each interview was scheduled for approximately 60 minutes. Follow-up interviews were completed as necessary. When practical, the researcher made every effort to ensure the



interviews were conducted in person. This allowed the researcher to access data that may be collected through non-verbal communication (Creswell, 2013). When necessary, interviews were conducted over the phone or Skype.

All in-person interviews were recorded as video files whenever possible in order to document any verbal and non-verbal communication. Files were saved digitally in a folder on the researcher's computer.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

The TEA Standards Required for the Superintendent (2018) were used as the conceptual framework for developing the interview protocol as well as gathering and analyzing the qualitative data. All interviews were transcribed by the researcher and the names of all participants were changed in any saved files. Files were uploaded into NVivo for coding. Creswell (2013) defines open coding as the process of aggregating the data into significant categories of information. The interview responses were clustered together to develop themes. Using data from the demographic survey and interviews with the participants, the researcher went through interview transcripts to highlight significant statements that give insight into how they viewed their preparation. Axial coding was used to further delineate the themes into more specific school finance competencies (Creswell, 2013). Finally, a "research report" was created, which Polkinghorne (1989) defines as a way of moving from the raw data to a more general description of the experience.

Several measures were used to ensure that the data and findings are trustworthy. When designing the research questions, the researcher utilized peer debriefing (Patton, 2002) to challenge the quality of the questions and to make sure the interview questions were both in line with the research proposal and that they would potentially elicit the information the study sought

to discover. Member checking was used as a technique to establish trustworthiness. As part of the member checking process, participants were asked both during the interview and afterwards to clarify statements and to provide information that may have been left out through the interview process (Creswell, 2013).

Because of the relatively small sample size that was used, the researcher also utilized thick descriptions (Maxwell, 2005) to help explain the findings and provide as much context of the situations whenever possible. Thick descriptions go beyond simply providing details. Denzin (2011) noted that thick descriptions: (1) help give context; (2) state intentions and meaning to help organize the action; (3) trace the development; and (4) present the action as text that can be interpreted. Lastly, the researcher completed one final member check with the participants to ensure that the transcripts of the data reflected their experiences accurately (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### **Limitations**

Given the qualitative nature of the research methodology, certain limitations must be acknowledged. These affect both the initial design and final conclusions arrived at by the researcher.

Due to the sample size of participants, the perceptions of the superintendents in this study may not reflect the broader sentiments of superintendents across the state. All of the superintendents in the study are licensed and practicing in Texas which may further limit the ability to generalize the findings to other states. The researcher also acknowledges that the organizational structure of different districts may provide vastly different experiences and expectations of the superintendent surrounding school finance. Given the history, funding formulas, laws, and regulations related to school finance that are unique to Texas, the findings in

this study may not be applicable to other university-based preparation programs in other states. Finally, data was collected from the memories of the participants in the study. The amount of time between their preparation and their new role as superintendent was considered when creating the sample population. It is assumed that the superintendents remember the concepts taught in their school finance course. However, the reliance on having participants recall information they have previously learned may cause unintentional data to be included or excluded.

### **Summary**

Through a qualitative case study, this research sought to determine the perceptions of superintendents regarding their university-based preparation programs, and identify the specific school finance concepts and skills they feel are necessary to meet the professional needs of novice superintendents in the state of Texas. Through data collected from interviews with superintendents and analyzed by the researcher, this study provides insights into how university-based school finance training can be improved for aspiring superintendents. The following chapter will provide the findings from the study.

## **Chapter IV: Findings**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to analyze the perceptions of superintendents regarding their university-based preparation programs, and identify the specific school finance concepts and skills they feel are necessary to meet the professional needs of novice superintendents in the state of Texas. The study consists of a pilot study, a quantitative demographic survey, and a qualitative component consisting of telephone and field interviews. This chapter will present both sets of data as related to the following research questions:

1. What school finance knowledge and skills do superintendents perceive to be crucial components of university-based superintendent preparation program curriculum?
2. What are the perceptions of superintendents of how their preparation programs prepared them in the area of school finance?
3. What types of support in school finance do superintendents need in their first year?

The previous chapter detailed the design and methods of conducting a study on managing the financial responsibilities of the superintendency. Chapter four presents the findings from this study. It begins with a summary and analysis of the data collected from the demographic survey and is followed a description of the superintendents who participated in the telephone and field interviews. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity all each of the participants and promote trustworthiness. The participant profiles are followed by an analysis of the qualitative data that was collected and a summary of the chapter.

### **Demographic Data**

Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) data was used to identify employees in the state of Texas whose employee ID was coded as a superintendent in 2018. The

previous four years of district job assignment codes were pulled for these superintendents to show five years of data for these individuals. Because the identifying IDs were scrambled in the PEIMS report, this data was combined with the 2018-2019 Statewide Superintendent Salary Report. The TEA Salary Report includes the names of superintendents and their district along with a corresponding district ID number. This district ID number is the same number found in the PEIMS data which included the scrambled IDs. The documents were merged identify a list of 1,029 superintendents, their district names, regions, district enrollment, charter status, salary, and last five years of experience. These reports identified 333 current superintendents with five or less years of experience in the role of the superintendent. The Texas Association of School Administrators member directory provided contact information for each of the superintendents.

A demographic survey consisting of 15 questions (Appendix A) was distributed by email using the Qualtrics Survey Tool to the 333 potential participants. The email included an introductory letter (Appendix E) and a link to the electronic survey. Surveys were delivered over a four-week period beginning in May 2019. A reminder email was sent to those individuals who had not completed the survey after the first two weeks. A total of 62 (19%) responses were collected in total at the end of the four weeks.

Respondents were categorized by highest degree earned (Table 1), TEA district type (Table 2), district enrollment (Table 3), and self-reported years of experience (Table 4). While the PEIMS data was used to identify novice superintendents with five or less years of experience, two superintendents self-reported that they had more than five years of experience highlighting that there may be minor discrepancies in the available PEIMS data. The self-reported information collected from their demographic surveys was excluded from the study.

Table 1 Highest Degree Earned

<b>Degree</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Master's	40	65
Doctorate	22	35

Table 2 TEA District Type

<b>District Type</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Rural	50	81
Suburban	9	15
Urban	3	5

\*Numbers do not add up to 100 percent due to rounding

Table 3 District Enrollment

<b>UIL Classification</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percent</b>
1A (104 students and below)	10	16
2A (105-219 students)	16	26
3A (220-464 students)	15	24
4A (465-1059 students)	10	16
5A (1060-2099 students)	5	8
6A (2100 students and above)	6	10

Table 4 Years of Experience in the Superintendency

<b>Experience</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percent</b>
One Year	7	11
Two Years	10	16
Three Years	17	27
Four Years	11	18
Five Years	15	24
More than Five Years	2	3

\*Numbers do not add up to 100 percent due to rounding

The demographic survey contained two questions aimed at eliciting the superintendents' perceptions on the amount of time that they spend on tasks related to school finance (Table 5) and whether or not they thought they would benefit from additional training in this area (Table 6). One superintendent from a rural 1A school district reported that she did not spend any significant amount of time on school finance tasks, and while she was ultimately responsible, almost all of her responsibilities were delegated to other staff. This superintendent's experience appears to be an outlier as eighty-seven percent of superintendents surveyed reported spending at least ten percent of their time on tasks related to school finance.

Table 5 Percentage of Time Spent on School Finance Related Tasks

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<b>Time Spent on School Finance</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percent</b>
0%-5%	1	2
6%-10%	8	13
11%-15%	14	23
16%-20%	24	39
More than 20%	15	24

Table 6 Benefit of Personally Receiving More School Finance Education

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<b>Benefit of Additional Education</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Of No Benefit	1	2
Somewhat Beneficial	12	19
Beneficial	12	19
Very Beneficial	37	60

More than a quarter of respondents reported spending greater than twenty percent of their time addressing financial responsibilities. The higher levels of involvement in smaller districts (3A and below) appear to coincide with the research from Kowalski (2009; 2011) which found that superintendents were typically more involved with school finance tasks in smaller systems because they did not necessarily have the resources to hire additional support staff.



Superintendents in larger 5A and 6A districts may have the resources to hire school finance experts, allowing them to delegate some of their responsibilities. However, they are still ultimately responsible for making sure that those resources are being managed effectively. This weight of this responsibility highlights the importance of high quality leadership preparation programs (Hackmann et al., 2009). Nearly all superintendents (98%) reported that they would at least somewhat benefit from additional training in this particular area (Table 6). These findings align with the research done by Kowalski (2009), Kowalski & Bruner (2011), and Bratlein & Walters (1999) which highlights superintendents' perceptions of school finance as one of the areas of greatest importance in their daily practice.

There was not significant variance in the level of training superintendents received as part of their graduate coursework. Nearly seventy percent of superintendents reported having one or two courses devoted to school finance education (Table 7). Nine superintendents responded that they had not completed any graduate coursework in school finance prior to assuming the superintendency. The respondents represented nearly equal numbers of males and females in 1A, 2A, and 3A rural school districts.

While the lack of training through graduate coursework may have been a challenge, it was likely offset by the number of years in prior administrator experience that each of them brought to their new roles. With only one exception, each of these superintendents reported being in school administration for a minimum of fifteen years. This could suggest that although there are significant differences between building and district level administration (Glass et al., 2000; Kowalski, 2005), there are some financial areas of responsibility (i.e. budgeting, staffing, purchasing) which may have similarities and helped prepare these leaders to transition from position to position.

Previous research from Dlott (2005) established that despite being responsible for multi-million dollar budgets, most superintendents do not have a background in finance. Of all of the respondents, only four superintendents (6%) reported having a degree or having minored in either finance, business, or accounting. Each of the four superintendents had spent less than 10 years in school administration before becoming a superintendent. Their average level of experience falls well below the norm, in which a majority (73%) of respondents reported having at least 15 years of experience in education before making the transition into the new role. These gaps may illustrate that degrees in finance, business, or accounting may be beneficial to those seeking to ascend to the superintendency more quickly, especially those with limited experience in administration.

Table 7

*How many college or university classes have you taken that were devoted solely to school finances?*

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<b>Number of Courses</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Zero	9	15
One	24	39
Two	19	31
Three	7	11
Four	2	3
Five or More	1	2

Regardless of the pathway superintendents take towards the superintendency, the amount of training they receive, or the number of years that they bring to this role, nearly all respondents (87%) rated their preparation as average, while nearly half perceived their preparedness for their financial responsibilities as “not very well” (Table 8). The scope of financial responsibilities these school leaders are tasked with is huge and their responses suggest that there may be a need for additional coursework or training in this area.

Table 8

*How did your educator preparation program prepare you for your financial responsibilities?*

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**Preparedness for Financial**

<b>Responsibilities</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Not Very Well	29	47
Average	25	40
Well	7	11
Very Well	1	2

As a way to address any deficiencies related to their financial management training, superintendents reported utilizing a variety of resources including: professional development opportunities offered through professional organizations (TASA, TASBO, etc.), utilizing their region service centers, relying on peer networks, transferring previous job experience(s), and creating their own in-service training opportunities.

## **Qualitative Data**

In order to better understand the preparation of novice superintendents and elicit their suggestions for improvement, semi-structured interviews were scheduled with superintendents who met the selection criteria for inclusion in the study. The study originally sought to reach ten superintendents for follow-up interviews. Of the 62 superintendents who responded to the initial survey, 23 indicated that they had earned a doctoral degree as part of their superintendent preparation program. Each of these superintendents were contacted regarding the possibility of scheduling another interview that would take place in person or over the phone (Appendix D). There were four superintendents who responded they were willing to participate. Follow up emails were sent to the remaining nineteen potential participants, but they did not elicit any type of response.

Because the response rate was low, the researcher contacted three of the superintendents who participated in the pilot study to secure consent to their information being included as part of the study. There were no changes to the study based off of information collected in the pilot and the researcher felt their inclusion would contribute to more robust findings. While the sample did not meet the initial goal of ten participants, a review of the demographics indicated that the sample would be diverse based on school district size and geographic locations. Four participants were from rural school districts, two from suburban school districts, and one was from a large urban school district.

An email was sent to each person who responded that had earned a doctoral degree asking them if they would be willing to participate in a 30-minute interview. Instead of randomly sampling from the seven responses for inclusion in the study, the researcher chose to include all of the superintendents who chose to respond. Interviews were scheduled with the

seven respondents over a four-week period at the convenience of the participants. A majority of the interviews took place within the first two weeks of sending out the initial survey, with the superintendents in larger districts having much less availability.

A thank-you e-mail along with a copy of the informed consent form was sent to each person who responded affirmatively asking them for a time convenient to conduct the interview and requesting that the informed consent form be returned prior to the interview. Audio recordings were made of each interview and were transcribed using an online service. The researcher went back through the transcripts and audio files to verify the accuracy of the transcription and to correct any errors.

### **Description of Participants and Districts**

Seven superintendents took part in this portion of the study and were each randomly assigned a pseudonym. A description of the superintendents' education and experience is included along with a general description of the type of district where they work. Geographic locations have been excluded and district populations are approximated in order to maintain anonymity. The following is a brief description of the participants.

***Superintendent A.*** Superintendent A serves in a fast-growth suburban school district with approximately 24,000 students. He works closely with his CFO whom he has worked alongside in different capacities for the last nine years. He has been in education more than twenty years, serving in multiple school districts across Texas. He previously served in the role of Deputy Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, Director of Professional Development, Principal and Teacher. He holds a Masters in Educational Administration and has also completed all of his coursework towards an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership and Policy at the University of Texas at Austin.

***Superintendent B.*** Superintendent B is the leader of a large single high school district located outside a major metropolitan area. The district has an enrollment of approximately 11,000 students. The district employs a Chief Financial Officer who has previous experience working as a Certified Public Accountant. Superintendent B has experience as a teacher, assistant principal, principal, executive director for curriculum, assistant superintendent, and superintendent in various districts across Texas. He earned both his Master of Science in Educational Administration and Doctorate of Education degrees from Texas A&M University in College Station. Superintendent B currently serves on the Texas High Performance Schools Consortium; previously served on the Texas Association of School Administrators' Legislative Services Committee; the TEA Commissioner's Cabinet of Superintendents; and is Past President of the Fast Growth Schools Coalition.

***Superintendent C.*** Superintendent C was originally hired as the high school principal of his district before being promoted to Superintendent two years later. He has served in this position for the last five years. Superintendent C meets with his CFO at least twice a week and noted that has hired four different Chief Financial Officers over the last five years. Prior to joining the district of 3,500 students, he served as middle school assistant principal and teacher in several other rural districts across Texas, each having less than 200 students district-wide. He earned both his Master's and Doctoral degrees in Educational Administration from Texas A&M University-Kingsville.

***Superintendent D.*** Superintendent D serves in a small district located in between Austin and Houston. The district has approximately 250 students and has seen little to no growth over the last several years. Due to the size of his district, Superintendent D also serves as the district's business manager and has direct responsibility for all district financial matters. He earned his

Master's degree in Educational Administration and Supervision from The University of Texas at Arlington and earned his doctorate in Educational Leadership and Administration from Texas A&M University – Commerce. Prior to the superintendency, he was a school leader in north and east Texas.

***Superintendent E.*** Superintendent E leads a small district in north Texas that serves approximately 1,700 students. He has experience as a campus leader on several secondary campuses and served as an assistant superintendent before moving into his current position where he has served for the last three years. Superintendent E has a finance director to whom he has delegated most responsibilities. He reports serving mainly in a supervisory role and gets updates on a weekly basis. He completed both his master's and doctoral coursework at Tarleton State University.

***Superintendent F.*** Superintendent F is in his second year leading a growing district of approximately 7,500 students. He previously served as an elementary principal, middle school principal, interim, and deputy superintendent in a similarly sized district. His district utilizes a Chief Financial Officer who handles the day to day operations of the business department and meets with the superintendent on a weekly basis. He earned his master's from Schreiner University and his doctorate from Texas Tech University.

***Superintendent G.*** Superintendent G is the leader of a large urban school district that serving over 75,000 students. He has held this position for five years. He has over 30 years of experience in education serving as a deputy commissioner at the Texas Education Agency, a campus administrator, central office administrator, and a superintendent in another district. He works closely with his Chief Business Officer who oversees everything under the umbrella of

school finance. Superintendent G earned his master's in Educational Administration from Corpus Christi State and his doctorate from The University of Texas at Austin.

## **Results**

The following section explores the findings within the context of each research questions. Major themes emerged from the data, and each major theme is supported information identified through the research. An analysis of the data revealed major themes as the participants reflected on the financial knowledge and skills necessary to navigate their roles as novice superintendents, their own preparation, and types of support they found useful after stepping into their new roles.

*Question 1: What school finance knowledge and skills do superintendents perceive to be crucial components of university-based superintendent preparation program curriculum?*

Research Question 1 aimed to identify specific topics and skills related to school finance that would be the most helpful areas of focus for superintendents completing a university-based preparation program as part of the superintendent certification process. For the purpose of this study, university-based preparation programs will be generally defined as leadership preparation doctoral programs for superintendents that are operated by American colleges and universities. School finance includes the day-to-day operations that ensure the continued production of payroll, funds management, as well as the essential process of developing, monitoring, and evaluating budgets.

The data from this study revealed that a thorough understanding of how budgets are created and function is critical regardless of the size of the school district. Because so many other aspects of school finance are situational, the superintendents in the study did not believe a university-based preparation program needed to delve too deeply into specifics related to any one



finance area. Two unexpected themes emerged from the data across all sizes of school districts. The first theme highlights the importance of superintendents having clear decision-making models established as they manage resources, and the second centers around the role conceptualization of the superintendent as an effective communicator.

Interviews revealed that superintendents' own unique experiences in their jobs influenced how they prioritized the topics that should be covered as part of a superintendent preparation program. Despite superintendents each being ultimately responsible for the complete finances of the district, the enrollment and financial resources of their respective school districts played a large role in defining how involved different superintendents were with the day-to-day fiscal operations of their districts, and thus what they perceived to be the most important topics and skills that should be covered in superintendent preparation programs. The larger the enrollment of the district, the more likely the district was organized to provide additional leadership in this area. In contrast, many of the smaller school districts, the superintendents took sole responsibility for this role and executed many of the tasks typically handled by a business manager or financial officer. These discrepancies make it difficult to isolate what should be prioritized in a preparation program tasked with preparing leaders for roles in districts of all sizes. Superintendent B stated:

The problem is you're teaching to superintendents that are going to go into a wide variety of roles. Fifty percent of the districts in the state of Texas probably have five or six hundred kids or fewer, so they're going to be the finance person. And probably 75 or 80 percent of the districts have 3,000 kids or fewer, they're small, small districts, so they're going to be heavily involved in filling out the tables and whatnot for TEA. But then you have people like me. I'm not really doing the day to day work, but you've got all of those people in the classroom and that's hard. Luckily, I defer completely to my CFO. We've got a comptroller and four or five other staff members down there who just run all that. Lucky for me, I don't really have to do the details.

As was evidenced in the data collected from the demographic survey, superintendents in small districts (3A and below) typically reported spending the most time on school finance related tasks because they lack the support staff to assist in this area (Table 5). Superintendent D explained his role by saying:

We're a small 1A school district. I am actually the business manager as well. I oversee moving money from one account to the other account and I oversee the entire audit. Day-to-day, I pay the health care premiums. I don't actually have to cut the checks for the vendors and cut the checks for payroll, but basically, I'm the one that moves all the money, does all the investing, all those type of things. If there's a journal entry that has to be made in the computer for accounting purposes, I'm the one that has to make that journal entry. The only thing that is actually delegated here is that my secretary does the payroll. She's the payroll clerk and she's my accounts payable clerk as well. She cuts checks, and our receptionist actually deposits all the money. We actually have three different people that are kind of in charge that way. No one person has any full authority.

As the respective school districts of the participating superintendents increased in size, you began to see the introduction of business managers, finance directors, chief financial officers. The titles and actual job responsibilities vary in each district, as does the superintendents' involvement in this function of the superintendency. The level of superintendent involvement does not seem to necessarily be as connected to the district enrollment as it does individual leadership style of the superintendent. Superintendents in the study reported meeting with their financial officer as little as once a month to review financial reports to as often as once or twice a week regardless of the size of the district. Superintendent F stated:

Being that we're medium sized I have a CFO chief financial officer that I rely on heavily so that oversight is there. But it's not direct involvement in the day to day operations of the business department. He handles it all. I'm part of any major decisions that we're making. We have a budget committee which consist of the CFO, three trustees, and myself and we meet once a month.

The presence of financial staff does not absolve the superintendent of their financial responsibilities as defined by TEA. Regardless of their level of involvement in various particulars, each of the superintendents interviewed reiterated the that the superintendent is

responsible for knowing what is going on throughout the district and will ultimately be held accountable in any type of mismanagement. Superintendent D stated:

I think it's extremely important that superintendents know exactly where everything's at. Yeah, we delegate. But if you delegate without checking, then you're liable for those things. You may not be able to delegate stuff but I always say this: if you don't inspect what you expect, you never know what you're going to get.

While there is clear agreement that superintendents are responsible for all functions of the school district, defining what should be covered in preparation programs versus what should be left to learn on the job is much more of a challenge. Superintendent E stated:

You know the reality is I'm not sure that they can ever completely prepare you to do this job until you kind of get thrown in to do it. It's kind of like learning to do a checkbook when you're using play money. That's one thing, but when it's really your money and it's your job, it changes just your whole expectations and how you do business.

Decades of research clearly indicates that school finance is an area in which superintendents feel underprepared as they move into their new roles as novice superintendents (Glass & Franceschini, 2007; Petersen et al. 2008; Glass et al., 2000). While all participants spoke towards the overall complexity of school finance issues and funding mechanisms, several saw the issue from a simpler viewpoint. Despite being responsible for one of the largest school systems in the state, Superintendent G stated that you really only need to grasp a general understanding of school finance through your preparation program. While there is a wealth of information that could be useful, he reflected on how quickly information changes. Referencing some of the changes he has seen through various legislative cycles, he pointed out that “things are changing so much, you don't want to get too into the weeds.” Superintendent A also cautioned about getting bogged down with the minutia of school finance in preparation programs. He stated:

People always ask me if I need to know more about finance before I take this job. And I'm like, what is there to know? You only have X number of dollars to spend, and it's all predicated on a formula. With human resources, eighty-two to eighty-five percent of your budget is already set. The rest of it is discretionary and it's all tied in with something already.

While there weren't specific formulas or processes they found crucial to understand before taking the job, the superintendents did stress the importance of understanding how budgets work at the district level. There are many similarities to individual campus budgeting practices, but the superintendents who participated in the study argued the numbers get a little more difficult to manage at the district level. Superintendent C stated:

It's not as simple as it should be and that is difficult for many people, including school board members. Your revenues fluctuate as your attendance, certified property values, and tax appeals fluctuate. All of those things create a moving target. It's not like a salary or when someone says, here's your budget and this is how much money you have to spend. It's not like that. These revenue sources and things like that can really fluctuate, you know, two hundred million dollars in eight days. I think that we need to make sure that we are learning about the history of school finance in Texas so we can understand what's been done in the past and how we've gotten to this point. And I think it's critical to have a good understanding the percentages of all the things that comprise your budget, what a healthy budget looks like, and how you manage that. What are taxes and what are your revenue sources? You know, some small things like that.

Superintendent E specifically highlighted the importance of good budgeting practices when planning for unexpected large capital expenditures such as HVAC replacement, emergency facility repairs, etc.:

Well you know the way we try to plan for the unexpected is to build a little cushion into our budget. When you are setting your budget, you have to remember that your budget is built around your enrollment and your attendance. The reality is that you're not going to get all of that funding because of lower attendance and so you have to plan accordingly. So, although there are many similarities, variable inputs such as student attendance, property values, and emergency capital expenditures make district-level budgeting harder to lock down. Many campus budgets are clearly established at the beginning of the school year, but it is

not uncommon to see wide swings in the available revenue of a district due to factors outside of a superintendent's control. Regardless of the available support throughout their districts, superintendents should be well-versed in the variables that can affect district-level budgets as well as making sure they stay abreast of how new legislation may impact their funding.

### **Decision Making**

There were two major themes that emerged from the interviews which were not necessarily school finance specific: decision-making and communication. Perhaps more important than any one particular topic related to school finance, superintendents talked about the challenges of deciding where to invest time and resources. In speaking towards the skills learned in his preparation program, Superintendent G stated:

Understanding the general school finance system is a big part of the job. One of my favorite courses was the Educational Politics and Policy. Because your finances, that's where you put your money in what's important to you, what you're going to prioritize. But that comes from the political structure. That to me was a fascinating one because you sort of know it exists, but you don't know how to really deal with it or work with it. I think that course was an important one to connect with finance budget priorities because that is the human piece. That comes in to move all of these intricate levers as things in school finance system. But it's the political side that moves the school finance system. I don't think I really remember the general topics from my school finance classes.

With seemingly limitless vendors promoting the latest and greatest teaching innovations to district leadership, it can be a challenge to sort through the noise and find the best product or solution for the unique needs of your district. Considering the limited amount of funding that superintendents have available and given their responsibility to be good stewards of precious taxpayer funds, superintendents have to exercise discretion over every expenditure, large and small. In discussing spending in his district, Superintendent A says that as part of his decision-making process, he always considers the purpose behind the spending and the return on investment (ROI). He referenced walking through the exhibit halls at various professional

conventions, flanked by booth after booth trying to sell you on the latest research-based strategy that promises to help you improve student achievement. When you have all of these possible options to choose from, how do you make the decision on the best option?

It's going to sound somewhat micromanaging, but it's really about this notion of the dichotomy of leadership, where the notion is that you kind of have to know but you don't. I just need to know why we're spending it, and the keyword there is why, and what's the ROI with a metric a return on that thing. In my opinion, I had to be involved to ask the questions and certainly hopefully it's been vetted through the lower level processes. So, by the time it comes to me, they have the answers to justify or satisfy what I consider to be ok within the bigger frame of things. What that means, is that you yourself as a superintendent have to have some big picture understanding about how you want to drive this thing. How do you say no to some things? What is a system by which you say no to versus which you say yes? The system to say no is probably more important than saying yes, if that makes sense. Now, I'm still trying to learn that. I haven't perfected that process, but we do have a process by which things have to get a yay or nay."

Superintendents must have a clear vision for their students and utilize some type of framework to guide the decision-making process. Although they may take slightly different approaches, the study participants show that defining success as a financially savvy superintendent appears to have less to do with formulas and knowledge of numbers in spreadsheets, and more to do with how well you are able to align your spending with your values.

## **Communication**

Being able to frame financial information in a way that constituents throughout the school community can understand can be the difference between ultimately garnering their support and creating buy-in for an initiative or facing a mountain of questions and criticisms. The way information is presented to school boards versus experienced teachers may be similar or vary greatly depending on the topic. Superintendent G explained that the way you present information to principals is different from what you might present to teachers or parents.

“You're not changing what you're trying to say, it is just how you say the wording that you use. My role my role is to be able to be adaptable.”

School leaders who have served in multiple districts comment that no two school boards share the same dynamic. Different communities bring differing values and levels of understanding of the challenges school districts face. Superintendent A stressed the importance of being able to understand the local language when speaking about taxes and school finance formulas:

As a superintendent, you really have to know how to talk the language first. You know it's a new vocabulary that you have to adopt and understand how to know how to talk the talk. Of course, you have to explain to your people how you want things to go. But the ultimate scary thing is when you go into a board meeting with the board. In closed session, you have to explain certain things like all this finance mumbo jumbo. And when you don't connect well, you're in trouble. You have to understand the local vernacular of your board. There are all types of people, so if you're a small school district out in West Texas where they only understand one thing, you better have an understanding how to talk to them.

As the leader of the school district which has taxing authority over residents within the district boundaries, superintendents are responsible for answering to a broad range of constituents, only a fraction of which are families with students in the local schools. Superintendents are responsible for leading the instructional programming of the district, a role that families with children in schools understand, but everyone who owns property is affected by public school finances.

The average tax payer does not have an understanding of what Tier 1 or Tier 2 funding is or care about much money from the district is sent back to the state through recapture. They aren't concerned with what might be happening across the state or in neighboring districts. Most taxpayers are focused on their own tax bills, leading some to view the superintendent as the chief

homeowner of the school district. When discussing a recent bond election that took place in his district, Superintendent B stated:

My job most often has been to explain to our taxpayers during a bond election, a community meeting, or tax ratification election (TRE) community meeting, explain it to our taxpayers in a way that they'll understand concepts to vote for our issue. School finance is like a foreign language. That's a hard part, to explain to the people of our district that we need 2 million dollars through this swap of two golden pennies from this side of our tax roll, why we need more money because our taxes or their taxes are going up. Our home values are going up and our student enrollments are up. Shouldn't we be flooded with money? We have less money today than we did 10 years ago. It's gone. How do you explain that to people in a 45-minute bond presentation? At least understand enough of it to be able to sell your public on whatever it is you want them to buy. How our CFO explains accounting and finance issues and how the average listener hears it are very different. My job is to be able to communicate the message to my board, to my district leadership team, principals, directors, and then our community. I'm the chief homeowner and I've got to communicate to the homeowner. My job is to have enough of a working knowledge of school finance so that whatever the question is asked nine times out of ten I can answer it without having to call on the CFO.

Other superintendents also mentioned the importance of being able to translate concepts like debits, credits, average tax credits, etc. into terms that can be understood by the average taxpayer in the district. Even though they may have the resources to hire experts on the issue, the existence of a CFO does not mean that the superintendent doesn't need to be able to speak towards the issue. Superintendent F stated:

In most bond presentations, you can have your CFO or a deputy or a communications person presenting. Because of the past and where we are in this community right now, I felt it was important that I was the face of every bond presentation. I went through over fifty presentations. I knew that I would get some tough questions about property values, tax increases, and interest rates on 30-year bonds. And I learned something every day because there were some questions that came up that I was stumped on. I definitely learned a lot because those are the things that you've really got to be prepared for.

The previous data illustrates the need for superintendents to have a clear understanding of revenues and expenditures and their impact on district-level budgets. But understanding what they are is only one small part of the equation. Not only must they have clearly established



decision-making processes, but they must also be able to communicate their decisions to the greater school community.

*Question 2: What are the perceptions of superintendents of how their preparation programs prepared them in the area of school finance?*

Superintendents have continually identified school finance coursework as being one of the most important portions of their preparation programs and also as one of the areas where they felt the least prepared (Glass et al., 2000; Kowalski et al., 2010; Bjork et al., 2014). All seven of the superintendents that were interviewed had only completed one school finance related course they had taken. None of the participants had a degree in finance, business, or accounting. If this was such an important function of the superintendency, the researcher was unclear as to why there wasn't more focus in this particular area. Given the limited amount of time spent on this topic in programs across the state, Question 2 sought to have participants reflect on their own preparation and the components they felt had the most significant impact on their overall preparation as part of their university-based program.

### **Prior Training**

Most superintendents come into the role having little prior training related to school finance. The participants in this study all felt like this job was unlike any other they had held prior and stressed the importance learning practical information that can be placed in context. One superintendent made it very clear that this job was like no other that he had held throughout his years in education. While different positions in the district may help contribute knowledge and skills that can be later applied, there is no other job that demands such a comprehensive

understanding of the various functions of the school district. “It’s a career change. Every new job in the chain of command is a new career where you’re starting from the bottom.”

The Peter Principle was referenced by two different school leaders in relationship to how people ascend into the role of superintendent. The concept observes that in organizations, such as school districts, people are promoted to their “level of incompetence” (Peter, 1969).

Superintendent A reflected upon his own journey that began as a Medieval Studies major with limited classroom training and later led him to become a teacher, campus administrator, and eventually a superintendent. “What made me good in a previous world, didn’t necessarily mean that I was going to be good as I was promoted.”

The data collected from the interviews appears to imply that no amount of school finance training will completely prepare one for the superintendency. While school boards are often looking for leaders with both instructional and business experience, Superintendent F made the point that it is rare that you would find a novice superintendent with experience in both areas.

Many superintendents reflected upon the pace at which they moved through their school finance training. The preparation programs they participated in tended to speed through many of the finance-related concepts and spend very limited time turning these complex ideas into practical examples. One superintendent mentioned having only one course provided where every concept was “go, go, go” before moving onto the next. Another superintendent bluntly stated:

I don't think that that course prepared me at all. I don't know if I learned anything lasting to be quite honest. The schedule was intense as it was a summer course and I feel like we went through that pretty fast.

His comments were supported by other study participants identifying this area as one of their weakest skillsets. Even after spending some time in their new roles, the participating

superintendents all stated that this function of the superintendency is the most challenging, both because of the complexity of the concepts, but also because of the constant legislative challenges they face. The complexity of this process may help explain why three of the superintendents also referenced using the same textbook as they did in their master's program.

### **Faculty Experience**

The prior experience of university faculty was an area where each of the participants had strong opinions. While none of the participants in the interview could remember many specific concepts covered in their coursework, they all seemed to recall the professors they learned from. Across the board, they stressed the importance of being exposed to real-world experiences and how the experience of the professors and guest speakers played a large role in enhancing their education. Superintendent B earned his degree from a program comprised of exclusively of what he deemed “research-based professors.”

I can't remember one who had been a teacher or school administrator and they were teaching me in my graduate work how to be a principal and how to be a superintendent, which is kind of ironic. We wouldn't do that in medical school or dental school, right? Ideally speaking, you can't do this because there are too many programs and not enough interest, but you've got someone teaching that course who's been in it or who's had some experience being the CFO.

The superintendents in the study stressed the need for having someone lead the coursework who had more than just a theoretical understanding of school finance. A majority of the participants reported being taught by someone who did not have direct experience working in the school system. They made it a point to express that they had great experiences with their department and dissertation chairs. And while they didn't discount the importance of learning research surrounding the topic, the limited time they had in their coursework meant that they were more concerned with how these concepts would play out in their prospective districts.

Speaking towards his experience in a small school district, Superintendent C shared that he believed it was important to have a diverse teaching faculty because leading small and large school districts can be very different experiences.

I think it's a very different experience, from the different levels of support you have and the number of plates you have to spin at one time in a smaller district. It's not an easy job in any size district, but without the support staff underneath you, you are likely to serve as superintendent and CFO.

Many of the other participants also referenced need for more interactions with current and former superintendents throughout their programs, but acknowledged the difficulty in recruiting practicing superintendents to serve as adjunct faculty simply due to the demands of the job. Participants were interested in specifically learning how different laws and regulations affected districts and the decisions they made. Superintendent E didn't think that one could effectively speak towards those issues unless they had their own experiences,

One of the hardest parts is we need more former superintendents teaching the new superintendents. It isn't enough to just read about things like Chapter 41, tax rates, and school bonds. We need people who have done the job helping others mentoring them to the position.

Whether not the professor had some experience as a superintendent was not a deal-breaker for the participants, but the times the aspiring superintendents spent interacting with practicing superintendents seemed to make the most lasting impressions. Superintendent D reflected upon his own preparation by sharing:

Our professor actually brought in current superintendents to teach various classes. They would just come in for a day and go over everything that they had been through recently. And because I was exposed to real-life experiences, I knew a lot more of what to expect. Instead of just writing a paper on a topic, we listened to these real-life stories of things that they had lived through and learned what they did so that we could be better prepared.

Superintendent A took the idea of bringing in practitioners a step further by suggesting that university programs should also include instruction from both practicing superintendents as well as other district finance staff. Given that superintendents report spending only a fraction of their time on this critical function, it is clear that there must be others throughout the school district who also can provide valuable insights to aspiring district leaders.

I think instead of bringing a superintendent to these courses, I think you ought to bring a team of a superintendent and a CFO to teach the class. You know with the superintendent, you are only going to get one side of the story. It would be beneficial to hear the interplay of how the two positions work together to support each other.

The ability to take complex finance topics and put them into context played a large factor in how the participants viewed the effectiveness of their professors in helping prepare them for the superintendency. Across the board, the interactions with current or former school leaders made a lasting impression on the participants.

### **Suggested Coursework**

Finally, superintendents were asked to reflect on their roles as current superintendents and offer suggestions on coursework topics related to school finance that would be the most beneficial for students coming out of a university-based program and stepping into the superintendency. For most of these new school leaders, their experience dealing with school finance was unique to their time spent as campus principals. They did not discount the value of the experience they gained on the campus level, but noted that at that level, a majority of your budget is set and simply handed to you. Superintendent G admitted that he really did not know very much about school finance going into his first job. The biggest challenges he ran into were having to learn how funding was generated and, as the instructional leader of the district, how those funds would be allotted to different programs throughout the district.

Coming into the school system, I don't know that I knew very much about it. I knew very just rudimentary things and had worked with the campus budget and that's about it. But that's already determined for you. You get an allotment and it's up to you to spend it, but you don't really generate a budget. You get a certain allocation and you say well these are my departments and you divvy up the funds. So, I do think it's important to have some understanding of the fundamentals. But as a superintendent, you really have to contextualize it and get in there so you can understand how the decisions you make are going to affect the greater district as a whole.

Superintendent E brought up two areas where he felt the least prepared and where he thought he was the most likely to get questions from constituents throughout the larger school community: how funding is generated through property taxes and how bonds work. Most of the questions stem from the confusion surrounding higher enrollment and higher property taxes and how those two things do not necessarily equate to more money for school districts. Because of state funding formulas, increased revenue in one area may trigger a decrease in another creating a net zero effect.

Well I think the biggest priority is making sure you understand enrollments and how the money functions based on enrollment. I think one of the things that's hard for people to realize is as you collect more local tax base, you lose state revenue. Based on how the whole formula works, you gain in one area and you can lose it another. You think you're gaining money, but in reality, breaking even at best. I think the other piece of the puzzle that needs be addressed better in preparation programs deals with the whole bond process: going out for a bond and paying back bonds, etc. So much of a superintendent's job is dependent on bonds and drives what you do. When you go into different districts, I don't think sometimes superintendents even really know how to look, how to do the research, or understand what their bond capacity is, their debt capacity, or where they are as a district.

The importance of the superintendent's knowledge of property taxes was mentioned by participants throughout the study, not only for when they were in their first superintendency, but also throughout the application and selection process. Even though the role conceptualization of the superintendent has shifted over decades away from business management and towards

instructional leadership, those responsibilities have not gone away. Speaking towards the superintendent interview process, Superintendent A reflected,

I guarantee in every single interview they're going to ask you about school finance. You have to know who you're interviewing with, because to be honest with you, most school board members don't know much about curriculum instruction. They don't know much about testing. They don't know much about the course catalog at the high school. They all know what their tax bill is. They know what the complaints are in the community about their taxes. They're going to want to because that's the thing they're most familiar with. Surprisingly, it's not teaching and learning, or your experience with curriculum instruction, or what you've done in human resources. They're going to want to know what you know about school finance.

Facing scrutiny over budget decisions and struggling to garner support for various bond initiatives has given these school leaders a unique perspective in identifying some of the greatest challenges related to school finance. While knowledge of a reading program in a particular school impacting a small group of students is important, taxes and bonds have an impact on the greater school community and superintendents are more likely to face scrutiny in this area. The previous data shows that understanding the general components of how these complex formulas work is important, but more importantly, aspiring school leaders need to understand how these components interact with each other enough to justify various decisions to the average tax payer who may or may not have children in the school system. Leaders who fail to effectively educate the general public may find they are not able to acquire the financial resources necessary to accomplish their instructional goals.

*Question 3: What types of support in school finance do superintendents need in their first year?*

The complexity of the superintendency necessitates that these school leaders continue to develop their knowledge and skillset throughout their careers. While no two school districts will place the same demands on a superintendent, there is no steeper learning curve than when a novice superintendent takes on the position for the first time. Recognizing the unique challenges of this transition, Chapter 242 of the Texas Education Code mandates specific requirements for mentorships and professional development. This question aims to determine the most beneficial types of support that novice superintendent can use to satisfy the professional development and mentorship requirements as outlined in TEC Chapter 242, Standards for Superintendent Certification.

### **Mentors**

The importance of mentorships cannot be understated. Nearly all of the participants in the study referenced at least one other superintendent who had served as a mentor in some capacity, and several of the participants advocated for more involvement from practicing superintendents throughout the preparation process. Recognizing the value that these relationships bring to the profession, the Texas Education Agency has codified this learning opportunity into law in TEC §242.25. Requirements for the First-Time Superintendent in Texas, which states:

- (a) A first-time superintendent (including the first time in the state) shall participate in a one-year mentorship that should include at least 36 clock-hours of professional development directly related to the standards identified in §242.15 of this title (relating to Standards Required for the Superintendent Certificate).
- (b) During the one-year mentorship, the superintendent should have contact with his or her mentor at least once a month. The mentorship program must be completed within the first 18 months of employment as superintendent in order to maintain the standard certificate.
- (c) Experienced superintendents willing to serve as mentors must participate in training for the role.



There are many pathways towards the superintendency. Whether one starts out as a teacher, assistant principal, principal, or some other position, Superintendent D shared that a new superintendent would be “sadly mistaken” if they thought they would be prepared for the job simply based on their class work. He continued:

The only thing that's going to get you prepared for it [the superintendency], is asking those that are superintendents questions and trying to develop a mentorship, so that you have someone you can ask questions of. It could be just little things like finding the various budget codes or it could be helping you get a bigger understanding of what goes into creating the budget and all the school finance that goes along with it.

Opportunities for mentorships can be found in many places. Professional organizations such as TASA and regional service centers offer academies for new superintendents where participants have the opportunity to partner with an experienced superintendent meet multiple times throughout the school year. Superintendent C spoke about his experience with TASA’s program, praising his mentor for all that he was able to learn from their meetings together. And while he was able to connect to a mentor through TASA, some other study participants struggled to make connections with other mentors.

Despite the requirement to do so, not every participant had a formal or informal mentor during their first year in their new position. Instead, the novice superintendents just called on people that they knew. One identified challenge was geography. Some areas are spread out making it harder to connect with someone else. Some superintendents reported they would have to drive over an hour to get to the closest Regional Advisory Committee (RAC) meeting, and they were not able to commit that much time away from their districts.

Another challenge in creating meaningful mentorship opportunities was finding the right match. The responsibilities of superintendents can vary greatly depending on the community.

The issues that superintendents face in a 1A district may look very different than those in a 3A or 6A district. Two schools of the same size could be located in rural and urban areas, having different community values. RAC meetings include all the districts in a given area. In many regions that means that you have a group of superintendents with a wide range of experiences and priorities. Superintendent G discussed his experience networking with other superintendents from his region by saying:

Most school districts in Texas have a thousand kids or less. There's no comparison between what happens in those districts and suburban and urban areas. I do meet sometimes with a smaller group of superintendents to get together. We sort of talk about issues and it's more collegial than anything. Some of these districts are a different world. Some of the things I was listening and hearing in those RAC meetings are things that we just do not support here in this district in any way. Our values are different. There is no comparison. We hire 20 principals and over 700 teachers a year. One of our neighbors may lose a principal every five or ten years. So, the scope of what we're doing is very different.

Helping make better connections appears to be an opportunity for growth in Educational Service Centers and state professional organizations. Geography and size of the district are some of the factors that make it difficult to establish meaningful mentorship opportunities. Despite the time constraints, superintendents in the study all advocated for increased mentorship opportunities and also made it clear that they would be personally willing to help in this area.

### **Support Staff**

In addition to, or in the absence of, mentorship opportunities that exist, many superintendents reported on relying on both internal and external supports to boost their own professional learning. There are many ways that superintendents seek help including hiring CFOs, business managers, payroll and purchasing staff, lawyers, outside consulting firms, etc. The size, available funding, and priorities of the district are some factors that contribute towards the ability to bring in additional support staff.

In smaller districts, you may not have the funding to hire a CFO and it is not uncommon to spread financial responsibilities out to other existing administrative support staff. Working in a smaller district, Superintendent D reported that he is responsible for managing all of the district finances. Describing his organizational structure, “The only thing that is actually delegated here actually to my secretary. She does the payroll and serves as the payroll clerk and she’s my accounts payable clerk as well.” Under their arrangement, they serve as each other’s checks and balances so that no one person has complete control over the money.

For those districts able to sustain a chief financial officer or the equivalent, and to whom many of the financial responsibilities can be delegated, the hiring decision can be one of the most important that a superintendent will make. A comprehensive knowledge of accounting and budgeting skills is important, but school districts are complex organizations influenced by a myriad of outside factors, many of which are unique to specific communities. Because of where his district is situated, Superintendent A shared some of the factors that influence his district finances.

In today’s environment with charter schools, home schools, different things, and other school districts frankly trying to grab your kids, you can never be assured that you’re going to get “x” number of kids. So that drives how much money revenue you are going to have. You also have to be in touch with your local appraisal districts and we have five appraisal districts that we work with. We know those guys well. We know generally how the economic engine is going to work because you have to have some outlook on future expectations. So, you start figuring out oil prices. You start looking at bigger picture of things.

Hiring someone with the knowledge of school finance is important, but it takes more than just a knowledge of the particulars. You need someone who understands and shares your values and vision. Someone who can align all of the numbers and figures with the district’s goals. Superintendent G oversees all of the district finances, but relies heavily on the guidance of his

CFO. When speaking about the trust developed between the two, her knowledge and skillset were small considerations in that relationship when compared to her values and experience.

You know get to know her values and what she's about, and they're one of the reasons she's brilliant. I know just having spent time with her, that her values are right for an urban school district. She is there to help out all kids, but specifically kids who don't feel like they belong, who don't feel like they're connected. She has a lived experience. She's a mom. You build that trust over time though. I'm very lucky that she's here and that she stayed here. It's very clear what she values. She is not just a numbers person, she wants to help improve equity, access, and sustainability.

### **Professional Development**

Participants in the study made it clear that the doctoral coursework they received was not enough to fully prepare them for their new role, nor did they expect it would be. An aspiring superintendent's formal education can provide a solid background, but it's important for novice leaders to continually be looking for ways to learn and grow. The participating superintendents reflected on what they thought were the most and least beneficial professional learning opportunities that have helped them in their new roles.

The state of Texas also requires as least 10 hours of investment training which must take place during your first year as superintendent. Study participants from smaller districts commented on how the required training might be helpful for larger districts that have more funds to invest, but not as practical for the smaller school districts. Superintendent C shared:

It's one of the things that is not very applicable for smaller districts like myself. Now if you're at a large district like Austin ISD, or you're looking at Dallas ISD, where you have budget swings of possibly hundreds of millions of dollars, it makes sense to spend time talking about diversifying, but we obviously don't have time to manage that or worry about a half a percent or whatever it is. It's just difficult but we still have to sit through it. It would make a whole lot more sense for us to be thinking about how to manage our bond structures better or our debt better. And maybe even know how to do some things to make more efficiencies in your in your district concerning overhead or personnel studies, etc.

Many of the superintendents from the study referenced trainings offered by state professional organizations such as TASA and TASBO as providing useful material relevant to the daily demands of their jobs. Those types of professional development are great opportunities to expose superintendents to different frameworks they might operate from, meaningful vocabulary, and give them the basic knowledge needed in order to talk to people about different issues. The conferences typically provide updates on any new legislative or TEA rule changes which might affect districts. Because it plays such an important role in everything that they do, superintendents all mentioned making time to go to at least one professional conference each year. Several of the participants mentioned specifically seeking out information related to school finance and budgets. Superintendent C shared:

I go to TASA meetings, especially when there are legislative or school finance updates. If I have a specific question or an area of focus, I'll seek that out and then we'll go to that session. I haven't done as much with TASBO, but my CFO has. She's gone and she's trying to get certified. I think that's a good place to get some additional information. The best thing that I've learned from my experience is just be around it. Talk it, speak it, get with people that are discussing it, and have conversations with other superintendents who are dealing with those types of things.

The timing of your training seems almost important as the training itself. Superintendent F emphasized the importance of taking advantage of professional development opportunities before you step into the role. While you may not have all of the necessary context, taking time away becomes much more difficult to manage once you become superintendent.

The challenge is once you get into a superintendent, you realize there are so many learning opportunities in so many different areas. It's really hard to sit in some of the training because you don't have much, if any, background in what you are learning. Sitting through hours of investment training is a perfect example of that. I wish that I had taken some time to become TASBO certified. I think that would have been helpful and it also makes you a little bit more marketable for when you're looking for a superintendency. I had a superintendent who was really trying to groom me to be a superintendent when I was deputy and encouraged me to get certified. I just didn't feel like I could juggle it at that time. If I could go back I certainly would have taken some courses through TASBO.

Professional learning opportunities offered through the organizations are important, but participants shared that there are other ways in which they work together in professional groups that share common challenges, including groups like the Texas Small School Coalition, Hill Country Schools Coalition, Fast Growth Schools Coalition, etc. The benefit of these types of groups over statewide organizations or educational service centers is that you are dealing with schools who likely have similar issues and agendas as you. Because of his direct role in managing the finances of the district, Superintendent D also referenced serving in the Business Managers Cooperative and noted that oftentimes, these groups take time to set up smaller meetings at the larger state conferences.

Education Service Centers provide superintendents with opportunities to come together through different meetings and disseminate information. Because of the large variety of school districts that may be served in a particular area, there was mixed response on how useful these were. As a way of receiving information, superintendents in both large and small districts found them useful.

Regional Advisory Committee Meetings (RAC) were also identified as a great way to help superintendents stay current with legislative updates, develop a baseline vocabulary, and for making connections with other superintendents. The most common refrain heard from participants in the study was that superintendents need to learn about school finance by listening to the conversations happening around them and discussing it with others, specifically other superintendents. It takes time and practice to develop the financial literacy skills critical for success as a novice superintendent. Simply put, participants felt that some of the best professional learning opportunities came from actually talking with people about the issues.

Study participants suggested that aspiring superintendents take advantage of opportunities to expose themselves to school finance issues and other departments while serving as principal or working in central administration. Superintendents should take advantage of any opportunities they have to interact and ask questions of staff working in these areas. While sessions at professional conferences can provide district leaders with valuable information and supports, Superintendent A felt that novice superintendents really needed to find a way to “hitch a ride” with another superintendent.

My experience is that you really need to hitch a ride or hook up with a school district superintendent, CFO that's willing to let you in the meetings. To really have the arguments and decisions about how these numbers are going to all work together and where the final decisions are going to be.

Several superintendents specifically reflected on taking the time to establish relationships with the chief financial officer or business manager of the district they were serving in prior to taking on their new role. The information aspiring leaders need to learn is often more readily available than they realize at the time. Superintendent B reflected on how he used to sit through cabinet meetings and board meetings and find himself not paying attention whenever the CFO was speaking. He later realized he was missing out on a great learning opportunity that presented itself on a weekly basis. Superintendent C also emphasized the importance of working with your CFO, adding:

You need to get into it and learn it pretty quickly. Meet with the CFO get involved with budget planning early. If you are in central office or a campus leadership position, and you know you are aspiring to move into the superintendency, get involved in that process early to start learning it. If there are trainings and things like that that are offered, go to them. Attending Board meetings is another fantastic idea that I think a lot of people just don't do. Be around for when they adopt the tax rate, pay attention, and try to learn that information. I think most people just kind of think it handles itself and it really doesn't. You have to manage it. And it can be really daunting. I think just being engaged in it and knowing and being aware of it is probably the best thing also.

Exposure to financial concepts in real world situations is important. Board meetings are a great opportunity to learn about taxes, bonds, and to simply listen to the language that is being used when different people present information.

### **Advice**

Superintendents were given the opportunity to share their advice for aspiring school leaders that might not have been covered in their previous responses. While there are many ascension pathway options, superintendents from all sizes of districts referenced the benefits of coming up through the ranks and starting in a smaller district because of the experience one gains. Without having as much support in those smaller districts, superintendents are often forced to learn more aspects of the job. Superintendent D mentioned serving in a small district where he is also the business manager.

It's not someone else's problem when it is your responsibility. Having this experience, if I go to a bigger district, there is no way that I don't know everything that is going on because of what I know now. You may not be able to delegate stuff, but I always say that if you don't inspect what you expect, you never know what you're going to get.

Superintendent B spoke towards the value of taking a few moments each week to look at the issues facing other schools. If you know you are going to go out for a bond or try and pass a Tax Ratification Election in the coming years, read about the issues facing some of those districts so you can begin to anticipate responses you might find in your own community.

Make a little time each week to read about current financial issues facing other school districts. How a piece of legislation affects another district may look very different from your own and it's good to be exposed to different perspectives. Newspapers and newsletters from professional organizations are a great place to start.

Finally, the biggest piece of advice shared by participants was to not be afraid to ask questions. Novice superintendents should not be scared to admit that they don't know something



about school finance. Superintendent E felt like he was alone on an island when he began his new role.

Don't be scared to say "I don't know." I think the funniest thing about the whole deal is you come into school finance and you think that everyone knows what is being talked about but me. There are so many times that we're sitting in meetings, talking about stuff, and I'm like, what does that mean? You'd be surprised how many times several other people don't know what that means either. When I first started I didn't like to say anything because I thought people were going to think I'm dumb.

While all the formulas and regulations can be incredibly intimidating, superintendents have to just get in there, ask questions, and they will begin to figure it out. You don't have to be a "numbers person" in order to be successful. Superintendent G felt the most important thing was having a clear vision.

Where do you want to take the district, what is the vision, what are the goals and expectations you have for the district? You have to align your priorities with the school finance system and I think that has more to do with leadership than worrying about formulas and numbers in boxes.

## **Summary**

Chapter four included findings from a qualitative study and explored the findings within the context of each research question. An analysis of the data revealed major themes as the participants reflected on the financial knowledge and skills necessary to navigate their roles as novice superintendents, their own preparation, and types of support they found useful after stepping into their new roles. Data from surveys and interviews were analyzed to identify major themes. Each major theme was discussed with supporting information identified throughout the research.

The data revealed that communication and decision-making skills are two of the most important skills that novice superintendents need to develop in their new roles. The conceptual

role of the superintendent as a business manager is no less important or relevant than serving as an instructional leader. Having a clear process for how to make decisions and communicate those choices to the broader school community is more critical for a superintendent than knowledge of any single school finance topic. Aspiring superintendents need to develop mentorships during their preparation programs and continue to foster those relationships throughout their careers.

Chapter five provides a brief background of the study, summarizes the findings within the context of prior research, and provides implications for practice and further inquiry.

## **Chapter V: Findings, Implications, and Recommendations**

Chapter five presents the findings, conclusion, implications, and recommendations of this study. A conceptual framework is offered that connects the emerging themes from the research to TEA Standards Required for the Superintendent Certificate. This chapter offers a summarized account of the study, including a brief background of the study, and implications for practice and suggestions for further inquiry.

### **Brief Background of the Study**

As the Chief Executive Officer for the school district, the superintendent is tasked with serving as an instructional leader as well as managing the comprehensive operations of the district. Historically, novice superintendents have struggled because these responsibilities are unlike any other instructional or administrative role in the district, and graduate programs in educational leadership have been largely focused on the principalship. These dual functions are under increased scrutiny partially due to the rising cost of education (Abshier et. al, 2011), public demands for transparency in the decision-making process, and policies that demand rigorous levels of accountability at all levels of education (Olivarez, 2013).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Nearly one hundred years of research identifies the topic of school finance as one of the most serious challenges that practicing superintendents face (Glass et al., 2000; Kowalski et al., 2010; Bjork et al., 2014). Superintendents are responsible for overseeing the day-to-day fiscal operations and entrusted to manage large amounts of public funds. The scope of this responsibility combined with a perceived lack of training ultimately amounts to a huge source of anxiety for these school leaders. This study seeks to determine the specific school finance

competencies practicing superintendents identify as the most essential knowledge and skills that should be covered in university-based preparation programs.

### **Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

By answering the following questions, the results of this study add to the growing body of research aimed at helping prepare superintendents for success as they take on their new roles.

1. What school finance knowledge and skills do superintendents perceive to be crucial components of university-based superintendent preparation program curriculum?
2. What are the perceptions of superintendents of how their preparation programs prepared them in the area of school finance?
3. What types of support in school finance do superintendents need in their first year?

### **Brief Overview of Methodology**

A qualitative method was used to examine the perceptions of novice superintendents on their preparation in school finance and identify key concepts and skills needed to fulfill the roles and responsibilities required of a superintendent. A demographic survey was created in order to identify eligible superintendents meeting the selection criteria and to help ensure the study included a representative sample of participants. The survey also provided information regarding the amount of time superintendents spent on issues related to school finance relative to the size of their district and size of their support staff. This study primarily relied on semi-structured interviews of novice superintendents in their first five years of the superintendency.

### **Summary of Findings**

Though there has been plenty of research identifying the perceived lack of training in school finance, not much has been written on ways superintendents can address these deficiencies. The findings in this study sustain previous research on superintendents and their

lack of experience dealing with school finance related tasks (Glass & Franceschini, 2007; Petersen et al. 2008; Glass et al., 2000). They identify what practicing superintendents feel are the most critical skills for novice superintendents to focus on when preparing to tackle the fiscal responsibilities of the superintendency. Finally, they offer guidance on professional learning and mentorship opportunities that experienced superintendent have found to be helpful within this function of their jobs.

This study utilized the Texas Education Agency Superintendent Certification Standards as the conceptual framework and thus attempted to use the data collected from the study to generate suggestions for ways superintendents could satisfy those requirements.

### **Role of the Superintendent in Managing School Finances**

The amount of involvement of the superintendent in school finance related tasks varied according to the overall size of their district. This finding is in alignment with previous research from Kowalski (2009; 2011) which found that superintendents in smaller school systems were more involved because they did not have the resources to hire staff in this area. For those superintendents with other staff members primarily responsible for this district function, there were wide variations in number of times that they regularly consulted with one another. Of similarly sized districts, some superintendents met weekly with their CFO and others took a more hands-off approach, only meeting on a monthly basis. The data from this study suggests that the amount of time they spent with business management tasks versus instructional leadership tasks had less to do with their individual preparation and size of district than it did personal preference.

## **Necessary Financial Skills for Aspiring Superintendents**

Participating superintendents report that they felt unprepared to deal with the demands of their roles in respect to school finance. This study reinforces the research that seldom do superintendents have the necessary instructional and management skills necessary to lead complex school bureaucracies (Glass, 2006, Hackman et al., 2009). When asked about financial topics which would have better prepared them, knowledge of basic budgeting principles, knowledge of tax revenue systems, and an understanding of school bonds were mentioned as being the critical skills that should be covered in preparation programs. They highlighted the differences between campus and district level financial processes and stressed that these topics should be taught utilizing real-world contexts.

In alignment with Glass' (2000) findings, participants also believed that other areas including forecasting, auditing, purchasing, and contracts should be covered, as they believed it was important for superintendents to have comprehensive understanding of various components which affect district finances. Participants cautioned about getting too deep into any specific topic, given the likelihood that the parameters surrounding that topic would be subjected to future legislative changes, rendering that information as obsolete.

## **Decision Making**

The Texas Education Agency Superintendent Certification Standards articulate the knowledge, skills, and practices that a superintendent should know and be able to do as a result of completing a university-based preparation program. Texas Administrative Code §242.15 *Standards Required for the Superintendent Certificate* requires a superintendent should be able to:

facilitate the use and allocation of all available resources to support the implementation of the school district's vision and goals; apply legal concepts, regulations, and codes for

school district operations; perform effective budget planning, management, account auditing, and monitoring and establish school district procedures for accurate and effective fiscal reporting; and acquire, allocate, and manage resources according to school district vision and priorities (TEA, 2018).

Efficient and appropriate management of public funds is a key responsibility of all superintendents in Texas. A superintendent's success in this area will be less defined by knowledge of financial literacy terms and more how these school leaders are able to align resources to district needs. This study supports the notion that as part of their responsibility mandated by the TEA, superintendents must have a process for managing resources in alignment with vision and goals of the school district (TEA, 2018). While they took several different approaches, superintendents in the study indicated that having a clear decision-making model was more than just a TEA mandate, it is a pragmatic skill critical for executing this complex role.

### **Communication**

Kowalski's (2011) conceptualization of the superintendent as an effective communicator not only challenged the superintendent to function as an instructional leader, but more than ever, to clearly communicate their work in order to garner community support. The data from this study supports the importance of this role conceptualization, specifically related to school finance. How superintendents present information can sometimes be more important than the actual content of what they have to say. Having a CFO is helpful in this area, but there is no substitute for the leader of the district communicating the message. Superintendents have to adapt to different communities and audiences, making sure that they know their audiences. One of the greatest challenges of the superintendency is to be able to take a complex topic like school finance and frame it in a way that board members, teachers, parents, or any other community member understands.

## **Faculty Experience**

Superintendents advocated for learning from faculty with previous experience in the field and stressed the importance of gaining real-world experiences in this area. CFOs and other support staff can provide valuable contributions and perspective on school finance issues and should be included as part of the curriculum as well. Mirroring previous research, the superintendents in the study were generally pleased with the faculty of their own university finance courses and stressed that the overall program quality was directly related to the characteristics of the faculty delivering the curriculum (Hackmann, Bauer, Cambron-McCabe, & Quinn, 2009). Current practicing superintendents serving as professors or guest speakers were vital in helping turn theoretical knowledge into real-life experiences for study participants.

## **Suggested Coursework**

Superintendents have a limited background in school finance in other prior roles at the district level. Although there are similarities, there are no other jobs in education that will fully prepare a future leader to step into this role. While superintendents may have some experience with budgets in previous campus leadership roles, district budgets have many additional inputs which must be considered. Additionally, variations in district sizes and superintendent responsibilities contribute to the challenges that university-based preparation programs face when seeking to offer a universal curriculum that prepares aspiring school leaders for roles across the state.

Following an extensive revision process to address the shifting context in which districts operate, the National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) standards were updated in 2018 to reflect the most critical knowledge and skill areas for district leaders that should be covered as part of a district-leadership preparation program. Standard 6.2 articulates that



graduates from preparation programs must be able to understand and demonstrate the capacity to develop, communicate, implement, and evaluate a data-based district resourcing plan and support schools in developing their school-level resourcing plans (NPBEA, 2018). The results from this study support the NELP recommendation that graduates of preparation programs be able to demonstrate knowledge of both school and district-based budgeting. As reiterated by all study participants, a thorough understanding of how district budgets function and superintendents allocate resources is critical for the job regardless of the district size.

This study goes further to suggest that graduates of superintendent preparation programs also possess the specific content knowledge of how property tax revenue systems generate funds and have a clear understanding for how bonds work. Most importantly, school leaders need explore various decision-making frameworks and learn how to communicate the issues surrounding school finance to a wide variety of constituents.

### **Mentorships**

Superintendents strongly perceived other superintendents to be the most important source of information when they had questions. Although required as part of the TEC §242.25, Requirements for the First-Time Superintendent in Texas, not all superintendents in the study reported participating in a formal mentorship. Geography and variations in district characteristics were two of the factors that contributed towards this lack of participation. In order to address some of these concerns, superintendents should take advantage of local educational service centers and professional organizations as ways of making connections with others sharing similar values. The superintendent community is close-knit and all participants agreed that they found other, more experienced superintendents very willing to help out and offer support.

## **Support Staff**

A sound understanding of best-practices and regulations is important as the mismanagement of finances is one of the primary reasons superintendents are removed (Glass, 2006). Superintendents utilized a variety of internal and external supports to help with school finance related tasks, the availability of which was largely dependent on the size of the district. In smaller districts, superintendents may have sole responsibility in this area and should consider utilizing various administrative support staff and establishing a system of checks and balances. Superintendents able to hire a financial officer should look beyond general financial literacy and be sure that they hire someone who understands and shares the district values.

## **Professional Development**

Most school finance training takes place through graduate coursework and is typically limited to one or two courses in this area. The experience levels of the participants from this study mirror those from previous research (Kowalski, 2011), and demonstrates the heavy focus on instructional leadership in university-based preparation programs. While it was not the primary focus of the study, less than one-third of novice superintendents who responded to the demographic survey reported participating in a university-based doctoral program in educational leadership. Instead, these results appear to indicate that the large majority of school leaders in the state are earning their certification through alternative superintendent certification programs. These programs help aspiring leaders meet the minimum certification requirements with as little as four university courses, which may or may not include even one course in the area of school finance.

Previous research overwhelming highlights the importance of high-quality leadership preparation programs in helping aspiring administrators gain the knowledge and skills they need

to lead school districts (Cooper et al., 2002; Hackman et al., 2009). The findings in the study highlight the research indicating significant gaps that exist between the hundreds of superintendent preparation programs that exist across the country (Kowalski & Brunner, 2011). Given the discrepancies that exist in credit hours and program content as part of the superintendent certification process, it is clear that professional development is critical in helping to close some of the gaps that exist between preparation programs.

TEC Chapter 242 sets forth requirements for continuing professional development opportunities in order to “continually update his or her knowledge and skills.”

§242.1. General Provisions.

(c) An individual serving as a superintendent is expected to actively participate in professional development activities to continually update his or her knowledge and skills. Currency in best practices and research as related to both school district leadership and student learning is essential.

§242.30. Requirements to Renew the Standard Superintendent Certificate.

(b) To satisfy the requirements of this section, an individual must complete 200 clock-hours of continuing professional education every five years directly related to the standards in §242.15 of this title (relating to Standards Required for the Superintendent Certificate).

University-based preparation programs help prepare future leaders to manage the fiscal responsibilities of the superintendency, but they are only a beginning. Aspiring leaders should take advantage of as many opportunities as they can before they step into the role and practicing superintendents should continue to take advantage of professional learning opportunities throughout their careers. Networking opportunities offered through local and statewide organizations are some of the most beneficial ways to connect and learn from others facing similar issues.

As such, the following propositions are advanced:

1. The Texas Education Agency and State Board for Educator Certification need to consider the criteria used to accredit superintendent certification programs in the state of Texas and address the gaps in preparation. The 2018 NELP District-Standards are research-based, peer-reviewed standards that should be utilized in evaluating the curriculum used throughout these programs.
2. University programs need to carefully consider how they develop and evaluate their superintendent preparation curriculum to make sure they are providing adequate attention to each of the superintendent role conceptualizations and functions of the superintendency. In addition to a focus on instructional leadership, preparation programs should consider including coursework in executive-level business management and communications.
3. School finance courses need to expose students to real-world scenarios which help place the theoretical knowledge they have learned into context. Students need to practice building budgets and framing the way they communicate their decisions to different audiences.
4. Superintendents need to engage in professional learning opportunities to supplement their university-based preparation throughout their careers. Additional coursework and professional certifications are helpful ways for superintendents to develop their financial knowledge. University-based preparation programs need to provide students with networking opportunities and work to help foster meaningful student-mentor relationships.

## **Implications for Practice**

The findings of this study contribute towards the research surrounding the university-based preparation of superintendents. Specifically, this study focused on how university-based preparation programs help prepare future leaders in the area of school finance and what avenues of support are available to supplement individual learning in this area. Thus, the following implications for practice are offered:

1. Aspiring superintendents can use this study to help identify areas of deficiency in the area of school finance. By having a better understanding of the challenges practicing superintendents face, it may help to them to identify areas for growth early on and give them more time to continue to develop the knowledge and skills that needed to function as a successful superintendent in the state of Texas.
2. Professors of university-based preparation programs may use this study to help evaluate the perceived effectiveness of their programs and consider changes to the curriculum.

## **Suggestions for Further Inquiry**

This study was conducted as qualitative narrative study using superintendents who had earned their doctoral degree and were practicing school leaders in the state of Texas. Due to the sample size and demographics of the participants, the perceptions of the superintendents in this study may not reflect the broader sentiments of superintendents across the state. Further, this study was completed in a state that has its own set of standards for certification. Therefore, the author makes the following recommendations for future study:

1. Expand the sample population of participants to include those serving as novice superintendents without doctoral degrees and/or include novice superintendents practicing in other states.
2. An additional study could be completed examining the perceptions of practicing superintendents related to the need for business management skill development as part of a university-based preparation program.
3. An additional study could examine the relationship between a superintendent's own prior education and the level of involvement in the area of school finance.
4. An additional study could be completed examining the perceptions of professors in departments of educational leadership to determine the relationship between practicing superintendents' expectations and those of the preparation programs.
5. An additional study could be completed examining the perceptions of preparedness for superintendents who have completed a doctoral program versus those who completed a certification-only program.

## **Appendices**

- Appendix A Demographic Survey
- Appendix B Interview Protocol
- Appendix C Superintendent Letter – Pilot Study
- Appendix D Superintendent Letter – Full Participant
- Appendix E Superintendent Letter – Inclusion Criteria Survey

## Appendix A

### Demographic Survey: Administrator Perspectives of School Finance Education Preparation

- 1. Which best describes your district type as defined by the Texas Education Agency?**
  - A. Rural (defined as a less populated geographic area including small towns, open country, farming or ranch communities, or countryside)
  - B. Suburban (defined as a residential district located on the outskirts of a major city/transitional area between an urban area and the countryside)
  - C. Urban (defined as a major city or densely populated area)
  
- 2. Which best describes the UIL classification and/or enrollment of students in your high school or most of the high schools in your district?**
  - A. 1A (104 students and below)
  - B. 2A (105-219 students)
  - C. 3A (220-464 students)
  - D. 4A (465-1059 students)
  - E. 5A (1060-2099 students)
  - F. 6A (2100 students and above)
  
- 3. What is your gender?**
  - A. Female B. Male
  
- 4. How many years of experience as an administrator do you have?**
  - A. 5 years or less B. 6-10 years C. 11-15 years D. 16-20 years E. More than 20 years
  
- 5. How many years of experience as a superintendent do you have?**
  - A. One B. Two C. Three D. Four E. Five
  
- 6. What is the highest degree you have earned?**
  - A. Master's B. Doctorate
  
- 7. Do you have a degree or a minor in finance, business, or accounting?**
  - A. Yes B. No
  
- 8. How many college or university classes have you taken that were devoted solely to school finances (not as part of a general administrative class)?**
  - A. Zero B. One C. Two D. Three E. Four F. Five or more
  
- 9. How many school or school district finance trainings or professional development classes have you attended?**
  - A. Zero B. One C. Two D. Three E. Four F. Five or more



**10. What types of financial preparation you have received to prepare you for your role as superintendent? (Select as many as needed)**

- A. University or college program
- B. Alternative certification program
- C. A mentor or peer network
- D. A previous job (teacher, principal, assistant principal, assistant superintendent)
- E. Professional development through a professional organization (AASA, TASA, TASBO, other)
- F. Professional development offered through a region service center
- G. In-service training(s) held at your school or district
- H. On-the-job training

**11. How did your educator preparation program prepare you for your financial responsibilities?**

- A. Very well
- B. Well
- C. Average
- D. Not very well
- E. Not well at all
- F. I do not have any financial responsibilities

**12. What is the approximate dollar amount of the annual budget you are personally responsible for?**

- A. Less than \$500,000
- B. \$500,001-\$5,000,000
- C. \$5,000,001-\$15,000,000
- D. \$15,000,001-\$30,000,000
- E. \$30,000,001-\$50,000,000
- F. \$50,000,001-\$100,000,000
- G. More than \$100,000,001
- H. I do not oversee any money from the budget

**13. Which best describes your financial responsibilities?**

- A. I do not have financial responsibilities
- B. I have financial responsibilities but delegate them all
- C. I have financial responsibilities but delegate a portion of them
- D. I have financial responsibilities and perform them all myself

**14. What percentage of your time do you spend on school finances?**

- A. 0-5%
- B. 6%-10%
- C. 11%-15%
- D. 16%-20%
- E. More than 20%

**15. In your opinion, how beneficial to your current job assignment would it be if YOU personally had more financial training?**

A. Very beneficial B. Beneficial C. Somewhat beneficial D. Not very beneficial E. Of no benefit

**Appendix B**  
**Interview Protocol**

1. Please describe the types of school financial responsibilities that you oversee as the superintendent in your district.
2. Which of these responsibilities do you handle directly and which are delegated?
3. How important is it for a superintendent to have an in-depth understanding of school finance?
4. What school finance courses did you take in your university-based preparation and what topics were covered?
5. What school finance topics/coursework should be included in superintendent preparation programs?
6. Please describe whether or not you believe that your university-based preparation program adequately prepared you with the knowledge and skills necessary to successfully perform your role as a superintendent.
7. How would you describe the appropriateness of the faculty for the demands of providing academic guidance in the school finance courses in which you participated?
8. What types of school finance professional development have you completed?
9. As a new superintendent, are you participating in a formal mentoring program? If so, what is the format and how often do you see/talk to your mentor? Was it a district-sponsored or state-sponsored program?
10. Do you participate or gain support from a formal or informal network of superintendents (AASA, TASA, Region Service Center, etc.)? If so, what does that look like?
11. Not counting formal professional development or mentoring programs, are there other avenues of support that you have found to be helpful?
12. What advice would you offer other aspiring superintendents?
13. Please indicate any additional information related to your superintendent preparation that you believe would be relevant to this study

**Appendix C**  
**Superintendent Letter – Pilot Study**

Dear Superintendent,

My name is Ryan Zysk and I am a doctoral student in the Cooperative Superintendency Program at The University of Texas. I am conducting research on the perceptions of novice superintendents regarding the school finance training they received in their university-based preparation programs. My research aims to identify the specific school finance concepts and skills they feel are necessary to meet the professional needs of novice superintendents in the state of Texas.

At this point in my investigation I am looking to conduct a pilot study of my interview questions. I selected you because of your expertise based on experience as a Superintendent of Schools and on your academic credentials as either an Ed.D. or a Ph.D. To help me develop an effective survey, I value your input using your level of knowledge to help me validate my interview protocol.

Please take a few moments of your time to read the proposed interview and follow up questions and provide feedback. I am looking to establish the clarity, readability and understandability of the questions before I send them out to a larger sample. I want to make sure the interview questions are relevant to the identified research questions and allow me to gather information that will help understand superintendent preparation programs better. I appreciate any other comments that you have to improve the interview.

I would also like to schedule a convenient time to conduct the interview with you. The interview should take no more than 30 minutes.

I thank you in advance for your time and anticipated cooperation. I look forward to the opportunity of speaking with you to discuss the research in greater detail.

Sincerely,

Ryan Zysk  
Doctoral Candidate  
The University of Texas at Austin  
8869 Mountain Ridge Circle  
Austin, TX 78759  
512-680-8233

## **Appendix D Superintendent Letter**

Dear Superintendent,

My name is Ryan Zysk and I am a doctoral student in the Cooperative Superintendency Program at The University of Texas. I am conducting research on the perceptions of novice superintendents regarding the school finance training they received in their university-based preparation programs. My research aims to identify the specific school finance concepts and skills they feel are necessary to meet the professional needs of novice superintendents in the state of Texas.

I am writing to ask if you would be willing to participate in a 30-minute telephone or in person interview to discuss your perceptions of your administrative preparation program. Interview responses will be confidential and numeric identifiers will be assigned to those being interviewed in the final research report. Participation in the study is voluntary and participants may withdraw from the study at any time for any reason.

This project has been approved by The University of Texas Institutional Review Board: (512) 232-1531. There are no perceived risks associated with participation in the study. The results will be analyzed and reported in my dissertation. If you would like the results, you can e-mail me at ryanzysk@utexas.edu and I will be glad to send them to you.

You will receive no direct benefit from participating in this study; however, your participation will further the research around how university-based preparation programs can help prepare novice superintendents to meet the financial responsibilities associated with the superintendency. If you elect to participate in the study a copy of the Informed Consent Form will be sent to you prior to the interview. The interview will only be conducted once the Informed Consent Form has been returned to me.

I thank you in advance for your time and anticipated cooperation. I look forward to the opportunity of speaking with you to discuss the research in greater detail.

Sincerely,

Ryan Zysk  
Doctoral Candidate  
The University of Texas at Austin  
8869 Mountain Ridge Circle  
Austin, TX 78759  
512-680-8233

**Appendix E**  
**Superintendent Letter – Inclusion Criteria Survey**

Dear Superintendent,

My name is Ryan Zysk and I am a doctoral student in the Cooperative Superintendency Program at The University of Texas. I am conducting research on the perceptions of novice superintendents regarding the school finance training they received in their university-based preparation programs. My research aims to identify the specific school finance concepts and skills they feel are necessary to meet the professional needs of novice superintendents in the state of Texas.

You have been selected as a potential participant based on your years of experience as a superintendent. To help me gather a sample that better reflects the roles and responsibilities of superintendents in our state, I would appreciate you completing a brief online survey which can be accessed by clicking below. The survey contains 15 short multiple-choice questions and can be completed in less than two minutes.

If you meet the inclusion criteria and are interested in helping improve school finance education in university-based preparation programs, I may follow up with you to schedule an interview in person or over the phone.

Thank you in advance for your time and anticipated cooperation. Please don't hesitate to reach out if you have any questions or concerns about the research. I look forward to the opportunity to speak with you in the future.

Sincerely,

Ryan Zysk  
Doctoral Candidate  
The University of Texas at Austin  
8869 Mountain Ridge Circle  
Austin, TX 78759  
512-680-8233

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## VITA

Ryan Zysk was born in Jackson, Mississippi. He grew up outside of Nashville, Tennessee before moving to Texas where he graduated from McCallum High School, Austin, Texas, in 1998. He graduated from The University of Texas at Austin in 2003 where he received his Bachelor of Science in Music Studies. He immediately began his career as the Director of Bands for Anderson High School in Austin, Texas, and held that position for twelve years. In June of 2014, he entered the Graduate School at the University of North Texas. He earned his Master's in Educational Administration in May of 2015 and moved into administration working as an Assistant Principal at Anderson High School. Ryan entered the Graduate School at the University of Texas at Austin in June of 2017 as a member of the Cooperative Superintendency Program. He served as Principal of The University of Texas at Austin High School in 2017 and graduated with his doctorate in Educational Leadership and Policy in August 2019.

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This manuscript was typed by the author.