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Aligning Criteria:School Board Hiring Practices and the Educational Leadership Standards

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Abstract

One of the most important endeavors a school board will complete is the hiring of a

district superintendent. This study focused on Northwest Arkansas school board

members' perceptions of criteria used for hiring practices and review how or if they align

with the professional leadership standards. The research concentrated on the 16

Northwest Arkansas School Boards and examined hiring criteria via an electronic survey

questionnaire which was adapted from Klamfoth (2013). Following the survey, three

face-to-face interviews were conducted for clarification. The Person-Fit Theory (Kristof,

1996) guided the research and through the study the results indicated many Northwest

Arkansas school boards hire based on fit or need, rather than qualifications. The results

of this study may be used to determine if more training on hiring practices should be

considered for school boards. The results also indicated school boards should consider

reviewing the educational leadership standards in relationship to what is considered a

quality leader by the Professional Standards of Educational Leadership (PSEL, 2015).

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Background of the Problem

Hiring a new superintendent is one of the most important tasks a school board can undertake and is often considered a reflection of the board itself (ASBA, 2018a; Hess, 2001; Prothro, 2018; Torrence, 2015).   Sabatino (2010) noted school boards expect superintendents to think globally and then respond to the needs of the stakeholders, thus respond to the culture of the community. External search consultants are frequently used by school boards to narrow down the applicants and then boards are tasked with the final selection of the appropriate person for superintendent (Torrence, 2015). Torrence (2015) suggested that search firms provide more equitable criteria-based decisions while searching for superintendents, rather than local school boards that may be influenced by community and politics.

Finally, as discussed in Mathews (2002), school boards are significantly influenced by public, personal, and political factors which affect their duties and responsibilities, including that the most important duties of the choosing the district leader. Matthews (2002) stated, boards are looking for the miracle worker.

Higher education in Arkansas uses professional leadership standards as baseline criteria for what is considered qualities of effective leaders, specifically the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards [ISLLC] (CCSSO, 2007). It was important to understand if school boards consider standard criteria, along with local needs, while hiring superintendents for the district leadership role. This study collected information from the 96 individual members of the 16 Northwest Arkansas school

boards, to examine their perceptions of local hiring criteria and if or how they might align with the educational leadership standards. Trends in the data were collected and analyzed to determine any predispositions that perhaps were not in line with the current professional leadership standards.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore individual Northwest Arkansas school board members' perceptions of criteria for hiring practices and review if or how this aligns with the professional educational leadership standards. The study examined the criteria and qualifications for the job of superintendent, as determined by various school board members, with a focus in the Northwest Arkansas region.

Definition of Key Terms

For the purpose of this study, the key terminology noted below were defined for understanding as:

- **Criteria:** a standard measurement used to determine an outcome. For this study the criteria are the factors that determine the final superintendent candidate for a district.

- **Education Service Cooperative (ESC):** one of 15 multicounty education intermediate or transitional service units in the state's elementary and secondary education system in Arkansas that provide services, resources and coordination between ADE and the districts. These ESCs were established by the State Board of Education in pursuant to Arkansas Code Annotated §6-13-1001 et seq. (ADE, 2018b).

- **Educational/Professional Leadership Standards**: the nature and quality of work of persons who practice that profession, in this study educational leaders (NPBEA, 2015). For this study the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards [ISLLC] (CCSSO, 2007) and the Professional Standards of Educational Leadership [PSEL] (NPBEA, 2015) will be used.

- **External Search Firms/Consultants:** professional experts whose job is to advise the board of directors through the hiring of a superintendent by identifying needs, candidates and protocol for the process (Simpson, 2010).

- **Hiring process:** For this study this term includes the process in which a school board searches, interviews, and employs for a wage a superintendent.

- **Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards** (ISLLC, 2008) and **Professional Standards of Educational Leadership** (PSEL, 2015): a set of professional standards that "define the nature and quality of work for educational leaders, as well as guide professional practice in the preparation, hiring, supervisory and evaluative roles" (NPBEA, 2015, p. 2). The PSEL, formerly known as the ISLLC, are the current set of leadership standards used in educational preparation programs as a focus for what is considered quality leadership to assist with student learning.

- **Northwest Arkansas:** the northwest portion of Arkansas including Benton, Madison, and Washington counties and the 16 public schools in the northwest region serviced by the Northwest Arkansas Education Service Cooperative (NWAESC). Map included in Appendix A.

- **Person-Organization (P-O) fit**: The theory that describes compatibility of characteristics between a person and an organization (Klamfoth, 2013; Kristof, 1996).

- **Rural school district:** smaller in student population and generally geographically isolated location. For this study, rural school will be smaller than 5,000 in student population.

- **School Board or Board of Directors:** local regulatory authority responsible for decisions about how to manage a school or carry out local, state and federal policies (ASBA, 2018a).

- **Superintendent:** the top executive or administrator in a school district that manages day to day operations and under the direction of the school board or board of directors (ASBA, 2018b).

- **Urban school district:** larger in student population and generally geographically located within a larger city boundary. For this study, urban school will be larger than 5,000 in student population.

Research Questions

The guiding research questions for this study were as follows:

1. What characteristics do school board members consider when hiring superintendents for their school districts?

2. How are the professional educational leadership standards used by school boards in the hiring process?

3. How do the professional educational leadership standards compare to current hiring practice criteria?

Significance of Study

This study examined the criteria school boards use to make decisions about whom they hire for the position of superintendent and if or how educational leadership standards are formally considered in the hiring process. There are no known previous studies that have examined how Arkansas school board members use educational leadership standards as a part of the hiring process. The study may help inform Arkansas School Board members of the educational leadership standards and perhaps consider these standards as future criteria for hiring superintendents in Arkansas public schools. This study may also determine if there are discrepancies necessary for more training for school boards on educational leadership standards.

Assumptions

In this qualitative study, it assumed participants would answer the questions truthfully and candidly based on their own experiences hiring a district superintendent. It was also assumed each participant understood the questions asked by the researcher. Further, it was assumed board members involved in this study were trained in the hiring process while serving on the board of directors.

Limitations

This research was carefully prepared; however, there were notable limitations to consider. First, one method of collecting the data used a survey, so responses were self-reported and gathered from personal experiences of the sample group. Second, the scope of the study is the Northwest Arkansas Educational Service Cooperative area school board members; this group represents and serves the largest educator and student service area in the state of Arkansas (ADE, 2018a) so results may be specific to this region due to

differences in demographics and experiences. However, this result of this study may have transferability and could be replicated in other regions of Arkansas.

Delimitations

The participants for this study were the individual members of the 16 public school boards in the Northwest Arkansas (NWA) region, serviced by the Northwest Arkansas Education Service Cooperative (NWAESC). The Northwest Arkansas region has 16 public school districts and five charter districts that the NWAESC serves (ADE, 2018a). Because the Northwest Arkansas region services almost 89,000 students and 5,900 teachers, it was important to conduct a study of this kind in the education service cooperative area that services such a large number of educators and students in the state (ADE, 2018a).

Summary

The purpose of the study was to explore individual Northwest Arkansas school board members' perceptions of criteria for hiring practices and review if or how this aligns with the professional educational leadership standards. The following chapters describe the background information and literature review related to the study, the participants and method of gathering research data, the analysis of the data collected in the study, and finally the discussion of the results and findings. The final chapter also gave thoughts and recommendations to future studies that might be considered.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The literature review focused on three major areas including school boards, superintendents, and educational leadership standards. The literature related to school boards was reviewed and summarized according to historical background information, school board organization and support, school board roles and responsibilities, and the organizational composition of boards. The final section looked at the educational leadership standards, specifically the ISLLC and PSEL, reviewing their development and purpose for educational leaders (CCSSO, 2007; NPBEA, 2015).

Background: The First School Boards

According to Klamfoth (2013), school boards in America began with the early colonies of the mid 1600s. By the early 1800s, school districts formed committees, considered independent from the town's government, now called local school boards (National School Boards Association [NSBA], 2018). In 1862, Massachusetts was the first state that gave local citizens a voice in public school governance, creating what is currently known as local board of directors (NSBA, 2018).

Kirst (2010) noted educational reform in the early 1900s allowed for local control and extreme corruption or advancement of persons on local boards for political reasons. With the turmoil, it was determined by these "lay" boards that managerial duties would be handed over to more professional educators to centralize control and "take the education out of politics" (Kirst, 2010, p. 3). Matthews (2015) stated school boards have been in existence for more than 200 years; however, because of school reform, boards have become more localized and centralized since the 1900s.

School Board Organizations and Support

The National School Boards Association (NSBA) was founded and formalized in 1940 as a nonprofit education organization which supports local school boards with governance efforts (NSBA, 2010). The NSBA (2010) is an advocate for public education and sets forth guidance for state boards leadership. Today the NSBA represents more than 49 state school board associations, including the US Virgin Islands and has more than 90,000 local school board members (NSBA, 2018).

Arkansas School Boards Association (ASBA), an affiliate of the NSBA, has been in existence since 1955 as a "private nonprofit organization that provides leadership, training, advocacy and specialized services to local school boards throughout Arkansas" (ASBA, 2018b, para. 1). Arkansas local school boards partner with the ASBA to train, provide sample policies, provide counsel, provide sample superintendent contracts, and more (ASBA, 2018b). ASBA with assistance from NSBA helps local boards with policy writing, legal matters, insurance, superintendent searches, and other issues. These national and state associations assist in tracking state legislation and advocate for school boards, local governance, and public schools to state legislatures (NSBA, 2018).

School Board Roles and Responsibilities

The NSBA (2018) noted school board members are "elected or appointed officials who represent the community's beliefs and values" (NSBA, 2018, para. 5). The NSBA Handbook (2018, p. 7) stated "a school board acts as an agent of the state to guide and support public education at the local level." The National School Boards Association (2018) stated local control of public education should be the school board and boards, as a corporate body, should be the decision makers because they represent the "public voice,

provides citizen government for what the school needs and what the community wants"
(NSBA, 2018, para. 13).

According to the National School Boards Association (NSBA, 2018), an effective
board should have shared beliefs and values that align with the vision of the district and
focus on student achievement. With the shared belief system, the board should be a
united team that leads alongside of the superintendent (NSBA, 2018). Boards are also
responsible for carrying out policy and overseeing the financial obligations of the district,
under the watchful eye of the superintendent (NSBA, 2018). School boards should be
advocates for public education in their local communities and focus on improving student
achievement (NSBA, 2018). Matthews (2015) stated the school board should become the
voice of the community. The local board is the agent that guides and supports public
education and who is ultimately responsible as the legal authority in the school district
(ASBA, 2018b). Delegation of some powers of the board can be and is usually given to
the superintendent that is hired by the same board (ASBA, 2018b). According to the
ASBA Handbook (2018a, p. 14), the major responsibilities of the board include:

- Establishing the organization's goals and objectives of the district

- Determining major policies and operations, including complying with
  state and federal policies and regulations

- Establishing the general organizational structure

- Choosing and appraising the performance of the superintendent (the focus
  of this study)

- Financial obligations, including audit approvals

- Provide safe and secure schools and facilities

- Assist in improving educational opportunities for all children

- Support the instructional program

The ASBA Handbook (2018a, p. 22) stated "the extent of which a school system achieves its goals depends primarily upon the quality of its leaders, teachers, and other personnel." It went on to say a board "must hire a qualified superintendent to carry out necessary administrative duties" (ASBA, 2018a, p.22).

Composition and Demographics of Arkansas School Boards

To qualify for membership on the local board of directors in Arkansas, the candidate must reside in the school district they want to serve (ASBA, 2018a). School elections for Arkansas are held annually based on district choice of fall or spring and the district must notify the county clerk of which election date it chooses (A. C. A. §6-14-102, 2017). The terms of Arkansas School Board member are not less than three years and no more than five years (A. C. A. §6-13-608, 2014). If there are vacancies on the board, these positions can generally be appointed by board vote until the next election (A. C. A. §6-13-613, 2017).

These elected officials are often volunteers and commonly well-educated individuals, with about 75% having a bachelor's degree or higher (NSBA, 2018). The Northwest Arkansas region has a mix of both workforce professionals, as well as advanced professional board members. According to Northwest Arkansas district websites (2018), local school board members are lawyers, business professionals, bankers, construction supervisors, stay-home moms, blue collared workers, retired teachers, and other retired persons. The configuration of Arkansas school boards ranges from five to seven members (ASBA, 2018a) based on local board policy (ADE, 2018a).

The Northwest Arkansas (NWA) region has 16 public school boards that govern each of the 16 school districts in the region. These districts and their student enrollment can be found in Table 1; a map of Northwest Arkansas districts can be found in Appendix A.

Table 1
School Board Districts of Northwest Arkansas

School District Name	Student Enrollment
Bentonville	16,870
Decatur	560
Elkins	1,256
Farmington	2,475
Fayetteville	10,017
Gentry	1,462
Gravette	1,909
Greenland	793
Huntsville	2,258
Lincoln	1,169
Pea Ridge	2,214
Prairie Grove	1,918
Rogers	15,697
Siloam Springs	4,281
Springdale	21,828
West Fork	990

Note: Data in this table obtained from My School Info (ADE, 2018a)

According to the information provided to the Arkansas Department of Education's (ADE, 2018a), there are 98 individual board members in the Northwest Arkansas region of which 35 are female and 63 are male.

The Superintendency

Though the focus of this study was on school board members, it was important to understand how the superintendent of schools became a part of the district leadership. It was also important to understand how the hiring of the superintendent became a crucial responsibility of the local school board.

Whitmarsh (2014) told about the revolution of the superintendency which began in about 1837 in Buffalo, New York with the first appointed school inspector. The first duties of this inspector were to manage teachers, finance, construction and maintenance (Whitmarsh, 2014). The early superintendent spent most of the time on administrative roles rather than instruction, but now the role has broadened into the responsibility of instructional leaders, developing a climate of purpose, community relations, and developing a structure for the board (Whitmarsh, 2014).

Roles of the Superintendent

The role of the superintendent has evolved from a more managerial role to the modern-day role of preparing students for success in society (Goldman, 2014). Superintendents today must be highly effective in communication skills and finance as well as great instructional leaders (Goldman, 2014; Henry & Reidy, 2005). Dr. Tony Prothro, Executive Director of the Arkansas School Boards Association (2018) discusses in the ASBA magazine, that superintendents are responsible for the finances, facilities, personnel, and especially academic student achievement. Prothro (2018) also stated superintendents are responsible for carrying out of policy and any strategic plans developed by the board, including protocols and accountability mechanisms that must be put in place to assure these are carried out by the correct personnel.

When 17 of the United States' most highly successful and leading superintendents were surveyed by Henry and Reidy (2005), the key findings of the most important skills to success were:

- Leadership, vision, strategic thinker, problem solver

- Communications and community relations

- Interpersonal skills

- Character

- Competency in curricular areas and support for public education

These leadership skills noted by Henry and Reidy (2005) are in alignment with the current educational leadership standards for practicing district leaders.

General of Attributes of Effective Superintendents

The ECRA Group Incorporated, formerly Educational Consultants and Research Associates (2017), stated superintendents must have district vision, managerial, leadership and interpersonal skills, and action plans for assessment. Other research noted some superintendent candidates (generally males) have a more dominant trait in the areas of finance, discipline, and management skills, whereas other candidates (usually females) generally were more experienced in the area of curriculum, instruction, teaching, and learning (Sperandio & Devdas, 2015). Much of the literature also noted some (usually females) had a more collaborative mindset and were inclined to involve community participation (Kawaguchi, 2014; Sperandio & Devdas, 2015). Though some studies noted gender specific leadership attributes for superintendents, this was not the focus of this study and was not explored in more detail other than as noted above.

Hiring a Superintendent

Today, one of the crucial responsibilities the board must face is meeting instructional needs for the district, specifically with regard to student achievement; generally, the superintendent is held accountable for this task (ASBA, 2018a; Prothro, 2018). According to Hess (2002), "given that few board members have a professional background in education, they are likely to lack expertise in many of the areas their board must address" (p. 18). Thus, hiring a new superintendent is one of the most important tasks a school board can undertake and is often perceived as a reflection of the board itself (ASBA, 2018a; Torrence, 2015). Only two minimum considerations are given by the ASBA (ASBA, 2018a) for a future district leader and those two suggestions are: have relative experience and preparation beyond state certification requirements and have the professional background, personality and leadership style appropriate for the community. According to Hendricks (2013), "in order to create a harmonious environment, it is essential that school boards and superintendents define roles and responsibilities and crucial that they collaborate to build a trusting relationship" (p. 70).

Local boards are responsible for establishing a method of hiring the district leader (Simpson, 2010). Waite (2013, p. iv) found a theme throughout his research that local boards use "vague and subjective criteria" or personal connection for superintendent interviewing or selection.

The Search Process

The ASBA Handbook (2018a) discussed that a school board must find the best person to fit the superintendent position for a district. The selection process is of "paramount importance" because the superintendent is the pivotal person in which the district revolves around and must be the "best fit for the district" (ASBA, 2018a, p. 17).

A district that must find and select a new superintendent should consider several steps and formulate well defined procedures for hiring prior to the need (ASBA, 2018a). The ASBA Handbook (2018a, p. 18) listed many explicit steps to developing a hiring plan which included:

- Develop a comprehensive description of district criteria, such as qualifications, professional preparation, experience and other qualities for the desired person with clear expectations and roles

- Decide an approximate salary and other compensations

- Actively seek the best person for the job

- Decide on the screening and interviewing process

- Carefully evaluate the applications and credentials of all candidates that meet the qualifications of the board

- Plan and conduct interviews for several candidates after 5:00 p.m. (Arkansas specific)

- Check references and perhaps visit the communities where the candidates work to gather additional information

- Select the top one or two candidates to meet with stakeholders, observing reactions from all parties

- Select the final person, finalizing the details of the terms of employment

- Announce the position has been filled and inform the media

These suggestions can be reorganized; however, the most important part of the hiring process is the "well defined and organized selection process that all board members agree to follow" (ASBA, 2018a, p. 20).

External search firms are sometimes used by the district board of directors, but complete authority over the final selection of the candidate for superintendent is left to the local board (Waite, 2013). According to Torrence (2015), search consultants are often used to advise the board and screen the applicants. When a school board begins the process of hiring a new superintendent, Waite (2013) suggests, starting the search early, advertising with multiple sources, and providing a competitive salary. The search consultants narrow the applicants and then boards are tasked with the final selection of the appropriate person for the job as superintendent (Torrence, 2015).

Research showed larger districts generally use search firms because of financial resources that are available and to assist in narrowing down the applicants (Rasmussen, 2013; Simpson, 2010; Vaughn, 2007; Waite, 2013). Rasmussen (2013, p. 28) stated a public search process takes a great deal of time and effort, where search firms reduce the stress and "streamline the preliminary interview process."

Torrence (2015) suggested search firms provide more equitable criteria-based decisions while searching for superintendents because they request a board develop a set of criteria prior to the search, when compared to a local school board that may be influenced by community and politics. Local public search processes involve all major stakeholders and are not quick processes (Rasmussen, 2013). Anonymity in a public search process can be difficult and according to Rasmussen (2013), many private search firms assure the application is confidential for those candidates that might put their current job in jeopardy.

A few criticisms of hiring a search firm were the cost of the process and taxpayer funds could be used for other purposes (Simpson, 2010). Secondly, the hiring processes

a board must follow to hire a superintendent from start to finish allows for more connection and commitment from both parties and a firm would take away part of the complete hiring process (Simpson, 2010).

Benefits of a search firm, according to Simpson (2010) include allowing the board of directors the opportunity to have less critical controversary and less political pressure. Simpson (2010) also noted preconceived views of a candidate, human resources law, and the opportunity for a quality candidate pool are other benefits. Finally, Simpson (2010, p. 36) noted an external search firm "gives the board members a clear opinion, unclouded by politics."

Educational Leadership Standards: ISLLC and PSEL

Educational leadership standards in Arkansas are used in higher education programs as a guide for what is considered quality leadership (CCSSO, 2007). These standards are aligned with the Arkansas Department of Education for administrators to "guide policies concerning the practice and improvement of educational leaders" (ADE, 2018c, para 8). These are considered model standards that communicate expectations to practitioners as to qualities of effective educational leaders (NPBEA, 2015).

Influenced by "current research and real life experiences of educational leaders, the educational leadership standards were developed to outline the principles of leadership and guide the practices of educational leaders" (NPBEA, 2015, p. 1). The current leadership standards incorporate the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) standards developed in 1979 that were created primarily for building and district level administrators to encourage a positive school climate or culture (Johnson, 2016). Johnson (2016) explains that due to the changing roles of the

superintendent, the initial set of professional standards were developed around competencies and performances from effective educators called the *Professional Standards for the Superintendency in 1993.*

After 1993, a consortium of 32 educational agencies and 13 administration associations developed the leadership standards and these standards were originally published by the Chief Council of State School Officers [CCSSO] (CCSO, 2007; Klamfoth, 2013). Johnson (2016) noted the CCSSO group developed the leadership standards for licensure called the Interstate School Leadership Consortium [ISLLC], CCSSO, 2007). The education leadership standards offer coherence in the complex work of administrators, raise expectations for educational administration, and provide a mechanism to strengthen professional development. The ISLLC (CCSSO, 2007) standards, which were developed for district and school leaders, have six components that address what is considered to be effective leadership qualities. These components include vision, culture and instruction, managing the organization, collaboration with stakeholders, integrity and ethical actions, and understanding the bigger context (CCSSO, 2007).

The first leadership standards (ISSLC) were published in 1996. By the early 2000s, the CCSSO noted change to the standards was necessary (NPBEA, 2015, p. 1). Family structures and conditions, political shifts, cuts in funding, and pressures of higher levels in accountability for student achievement are the many reasons for the essential changes (NPBEA, 2015, p. 1). These changes and challenges in the professional leadership landscape were considered, and the Professional Standards for Educational

Leadership (PSEL) were created in 2015 to assist educational leaders in "practice that will be the most productive and beneficial to students" (NPBEA, 2015, p. 1).

The PSEL (2015) are the most current standards emerging in school leadership. Developed by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NABEA), the new standards were created to address the transformation and changes in education today, with a high level of focus on the accountability for student achievement (NPBEA, 2015). According to the NPBEA (2015), these standards were developed to guide professional practice, as well as advise practitioners on hiring, supervising, and evaluations. Compared to the ISSLC (2008) standards, the PSEL (2015) have "a stronger, clearer emphasis on students and student learning, outlining foundational principles of leadership to help ensure that each child is well-educated and prepared for the 21st century" (NPBEA, 2015, p. 2).

The PSEL focus on 10 interdependent leadership standards (NPBEA, 2015); seven domains guide the humanistic or personal logic of leadership-to-learning, two domains focus on teaching and learning. Only one area of the 10 leadership standards discusses operations and management in school district leadership, noting the shift, focus and practices on what is most beneficial to the students (NPBEA, 2015).

The ten leadership to learning PSEL Standards (PSEL & ISLLC Crosswalks, 2016, p. 3) are:

- Mission, vision, core values

- Ethics and professional norms

- Equity and cultural responsiveness

- Curriculum, instruction and assessment

- Community of care and support for students

- Professional capacity of school personnel

- Professional community for teachers and staff

- Meaningful engagement of families and community

- Operations and management

- School improvement

The educational leadership standards did not address the hiring process directly; however, all 10 of the standards for leadership should work together and "does not imply relative importance of a particular Standard" (NPBEA, 2015, p. 8). These standards "communicate what is important about leadership" (NPBEA, 2015, p. 7). The interconnected educational standards are intended to complement one another rather than work in an isolated entity.

According to the PSEL Standards (NPBEA, 2015), human relationships is of central importance in both leadership and teaching and student learning. "Expectations of current district leaders and conversations surrounding educational leadership are rapidly evolving and the PSEL challenges organizations that support educational leadership development to move beyond established practices and systems." (PSEL & ISLLC Crosswalk, 2016, p. 1-2). The PSEL are a "'model' to communicate expectations to practitioners, supporting institutions, professional associations, and the public about the work, qualities and values of effective educational leaders" (NPBEA, 2015, p. 4). Currently, Arkansas has adopted the PSEL as the professional leadership standards and they are beginning to be integrated into higher education leadership preparation programs for certification requirements (Education Commission of the Stated [ECS], 2018).

The Present Study

Districts must hire effective leaders to assist with the challenges of educational issues. Attributes of what is considered to be a successful educational leader of a district vary depending on the perceptions of those that hire for the role of district leader. The PSEL Standards (NPBEA, 2015, p. 7) "can inform the work of central office administrative leaders and school boards." PSEL (NPBEA, 2015, p. 7) also noted "schools and school districts need effective leaders like never before to take on the challenges and opportunities facing education today and, in the future, and the 2015 Standards paint a rich portrait of such a leader."

The leadership standards are not meant to "prescribe specific actions" but to be used as a foundation of principles to inform the work for district leaders as well as school boards (NPBEAL, 2015, p. 6). Matthews (2015) stated school boards traditionally have focused on governance rather than student achievement. Historically boards were created to govern or work on the daily operations of school districts and student achievement was not the main focus (Klamfoth, 2013).   Matthews (2015) also noted the research on school boards' effectiveness on student achievement and governance is limited and some think the board members do not actually understand student achievement or student needs in general. The goal of this study is to explore individual Northwest Arkansas school board members' perceptions of criteria for hiring practices and review if or how this aligns with the professional educational leadership standards.

Research Questions

The guiding research questions for this study are:

1. What characteristics do school board members consider when hiring superintendents for their school districts?

2. How are the professional educational leadership standards used by school boards in the hiring process?

3. How do the professional educational leadership standards align with current hiring practice criteria?

Theoretical Framework

The Person-Organization (P-O) Fit Theory (see Figure 1) is a theory that focuses on the compatibility between people and the organizations in which they work (Kristof, 1996). P-O Fit theory is a part of a larger theory called Person-Environment (P-E) fit theory, which has four critical domains (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson (2005), The first domain of P-E Fit is the Person-Job (P-J) fit, where an employee is a good match for a job due to qualifications or his/her ability to do the job. The domain of Person-Group (P-G) Fit highlights the importance of an employee and a team or group having similar values. Person-Supervisor (P-S) Fit is a cultural fit between an employee and his/her manager, supervisor, or "boss." The fourth domain, Person-Organization (P-O) Fit, is where the employee's cultural fit with the organization (a district) as a community is a feature; P-O Fit is providing a foundation for this study. Kristof (1996) defined Person-Organization (P-O) fit as "the compatibility between people and organizations that occurs when: (a) at least one entity provides what the other needs, or (b) they share similar fundamental characteristics, or (c) both" (p. 45). A key assumption of the theory is that characteristics of the person's personality, values, goals, and attitudes

must be in line with the organization's culture, values, goals, and norms (Bretz & Judge, 1992; Kristof, 1996; Tom, 1971).

This theory is important to this study to answer the question: What characteristics do school board members consider when hiring superintendents for their school districts? Arthur, Bell, Villado, and Doverspike (2006, p. 786) note employment decision making can focus on matching a candidates' individual attributes, such as knowledge, skills, or abilities to the demands of a job (thus, making sure the person and the position 'fit' or match). Bretz and Judge (1992, p. 3) found "fit results in positive work-related outcomes" and individuals who are a good fit for an organization should over time have higher success and be more satisfied with their jobs.

According to the works of Klamfoth (2013) and Kristof (1996), fit has more positive workplace effects than negative and using fit has been shown to result in more positive work environments, better attitudes from employees, better ethical behavior, and increased work performances. P-O Fit Theory, according to studies, shows a low turnover rate due to goal congruency of the like groups in the workplace (Klamfoth, 2013; Kristof, 1996).

As filtered through the lens of the Person-Organization Fit Theory, this study's assumptions, design, and methods align with the idea employees (in this case, superintendents) are hired at least in part according to the hiring entities' perception the candidate is a good fit for the organization. The P-O fit theory serves as a foundation for this study by providing an explanation for why hiring practices follow the fit between the employee and work processes with criteria, including values and organizational culture. Klamfoth (2013) noted in Kristof's (1996) study of the P-O Fit Theory that fit often

matters more than the qualifications and performance in many superintendent hiring situations. This is important because this study is examining school board members' perceptions of criteria for hiring practices and if or how this aligns with the professional educational leadership standards put forth by the NPBEA. P-O fit theory helps explain how hiring practices may or may not align with these standards, as those doing the hiring (i.e., school boards) may be considering the criteria for organizational fit along with or in addition to professional educational leadership standards.
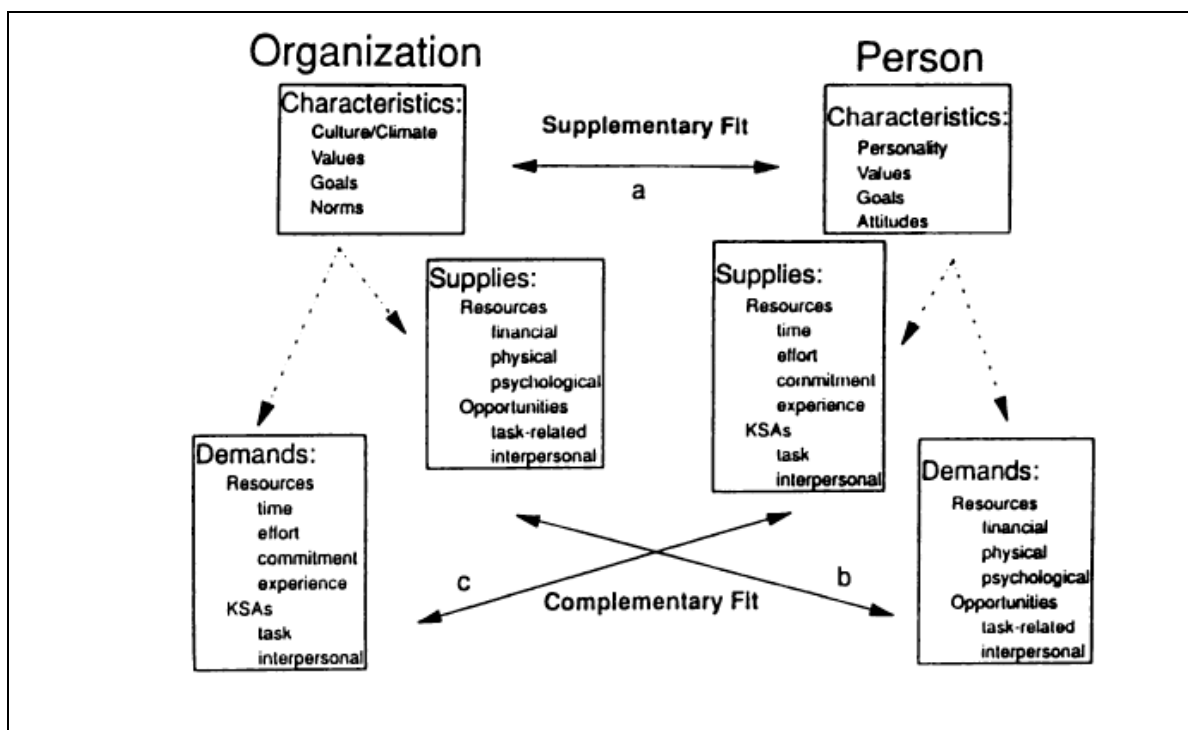
Figure 1. Various conceptualizations of person-organization fit (Kristof, 1996, p. 4).

Summary

This literature review discussed the history of school boards in public school settings, as well as the support systems in place for the school board members to access for training and assistance with law, policies, and the hiring process for superintendent (ADE, 2018a; ASBA, 2018b; Matthew, 2015, NSBA, 2018). The review also outlined

the primary roles and responsibilities of school boards, including the hiring of the district superintendent by the board or with the assistance of an external search firm (NSBA, 2015; Rasmussen, 2013; Simpson, 2010; Vaughn, 2007; Waite, 2013). Although the superintendent is not the focus of the study, literature was reviewed to determine general attributes of effective superintendents, which included communication skills, knowledge of school finance, and experience with teaching and learning information (Goldman, 2014; Henry & Reidy, 2005). The research noted the different qualities between males and females which appear to be considered by school boards during the hiring process (Kawaguchi, 2014; Sperandio & Devdas, 2015). Finally, a review of the educational leadership standards was provided in order understand how these standards were developed and why. The ISLLC (2008) and now the PSEL (2015) standards are used as criteria for higher education criteria or qualities district leaders should possess, therefore the research noted school boards should be aware or consider those in the hiring process (CCSSO, 2007; NPBEA, 2015). The literature review had very little information connecting them directly; however, the qualities school boards deem important for superintended appeared to align with these leadership standards for the most part. The Person-Organization Fit Theory literature is an important part of the research that helps describe why the study is necessary to conduct or consider (Kristof, 1996).

Chapter 3

Method

Introduction

This study examined the criteria school boards use to make decisions about whom they hire for the position of superintendent and if or how the educational leadership standards are formally considered in the hiring process. The research design, description of participants, data collection process, and data analysis are presented in this chapter.

This qualitative study used both an email survey, distributed through Survey Monkey, and personal interviews of Northwest Arkansas school board members to learn more about the hiring process. The three questions guiding this research were: What characteristics do school board members consider when hiring superintendents for their school districts? How are the professional educational leadership standards used by school boards in the hiring process? How do the professional educational leadership standards compare to current hiring practice criteria?

Research Design

The research design was qualitative in nature with a narrative approach overall. Patton (2015) noted the "narrative approach to qualitative inquiry focuses on stories" (p. 128). Narrative research examined the information from the human perspective (Patton, 2015). The researcher designed survey used the Survey Monkey surveys through email and face-to-face interviews to allow the researcher to look for trends, patterns, and themes that help capture thoughts of the participants (Patton, 2015), which were, for this study, school board members in Northwest Arkansas.

Qualitative research studies "how people and groups construct meaning" and interpret it to form conclusions based on those interpretive meanings (Patton, 2015, p. 5). The study connected the perspectives of the school board members hiring practices to what each considers important to the district. Rossman and Rallis (2017) described qualitative research as "having two unique features where the researcher is the means through which the study is conducted and the purpose is to learn about some facet of the social world" (p. 4). Researchers who used qualitative design generally conduct the research in "naturalistic and interpretive settings" (Rossman & Rallis, 2017, p. 5). As noted in Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach and Richardson (2005), qualitative studies explore attitudes, opinions and beliefs of people, therefore these perspectives were analyzed from the data collected, as was noted in this study. This method, although qualitative in nature, aligned with the Person-Fit Theory (P-O), which is the foundation of this study.

In line with Patton's (2015) and Rossman and Rallis' (2017) descriptions of qualitative research, this study reviewed and interpreted the data collected from the individual school board members looking for commonalities among the board members through personal experiences and reflective practice. This study used the qualitative method of electronic survey and personal interviews as the data collection piece (Patton, 2015). According to Jansen (2010), surveys in qualitative research help establish meaning in the variations within a population, which is the intent of using a survey for this study. Patton (2015) stated the researcher should follow-up surveys with interview questions to gain the perspective, depth and detail at "a very personal level" (p. 24). In

this study, surveys were followed up with in-depth interviews with some participants in order to gain this perspective, depth, and detail.

Participants

Participants in this study included the members of school boards in Northwest Arkansas School public school districts, who agreed to participate and had been involved in the hiring of a superintendent.

Sample. There are 16 school districts in Northwest Arkansas and a total of 98 members on the boards that govern those schools. A map denoting the area of Arkansas, specifically Northwest Arkansas, is provided in Appendix A. Only 97 school board members of the 16 Northwest Arkansas public schools, both large and small in size based on student population, were invited to participate in the survey for this study, with three participants selected for follow-up interviews (as described below). One of the districts had a school board member who had moved out of state and this district was in the middle of appointing a replacement member at the time of the data collection. There was no selection criteria for participants in this study other than being a school board member in the selected region of Northwest Arkansas and having participated in the hiring process in the current district (which will be determined in the survey process).

Sampling method. The names and email addresses of the 98 Northwest Arkansas public school board members were provided by request from the Arkansas School Board Association. All Northwest Arkansas school district board members were sent an initial request to participate, with two follow-up requests in one week intervals. After the survey link closed, the researcher reached out to three particular participants to conduct face-to-face interviews. The three participants for interviews were purposively selected

according to their survey answers (with particular focus on individuals who had exemplar information that was considered worthy of follow up), the size of the district the member was from (e.g., a smaller rural district, a larger urban district), and the district's hiring practice (i.e., using a search firm or not).

Data Collection

The data collection for this study occurred in two phases, first with an electronic survey and then followed-up with interviews.

Survey. Rossman and Rallis (2017) noted interviewing participants through survey allows for questioning with some comfort and easy access. Matthew (2015, p. 67) described the use of surveys as allowing the researcher to gather information directly from people about how they act and what they think, know, and believe; gather socio-demographic information to describe the characteristics of a sample population of interest; assess behaviors and attitudes that cannot be directly observed; and collect information from large samples of a dispersed population. The survey in this study was used to do each of these. Specifically, the survey used in this study helped collect data regarding the perceptions of the superintendent hiring process from the viewpoint of school board members and collect demographic information from the participants, as well. The survey was hosted electronically through a data secure site, Survey Monkey and the data collected was stored in the Survey Monkey site.

All 98 Northwest Arkansas school district board members were sent an initial request via email to participate in the survey. One school board member's email was returned and I contacted the superintendent for an alternate email, when he informed me the school board member had recently moved out of state and the board was in the

process of appointing an alternate person to replace the board member. Because this

district's board member would have been new to the board and would not have been

involved in a superintendent hiring process, I chose to not include these individuals in

this research. In the email sent to the 97 Northwest Arkansas school board members, a

description of the research that was conducted and the survey link was provided. (The

sample email letter can be found in Appendix B).

A reminder email was sent one week after the original email, and a final reminder

to complete the survey was emailed out one week after the first reminder, both of which

can be found in Appendix C. When participants clicked on the survey link, they were

presented with the Informed Consent document as was required by the IRB/research

regulations. The Informed Consent document outlined that responses were confidential,

participation was voluntary, and there was no compensation or reimbursement for

services for participation in the study. Once the board member clicked that they agreed

to participate, they moved on to the electronic survey itself. The survey was intended to

eliminate those who selected no consent; however, it let all participants into the survey.

The survey was noted to take no more than half an hour to complete; however, the typical

time per participant to complete the survey was calculated by the Survey Monkey site as

11 minutes and 56 seconds.

The survey itself was made up multiple choice and open-ended questions. Some

questions were created by the researcher, and some were revised and adapted from

Klamfoth (2013). (The survey questions can be found in Appendix D). Demographic

information was asked in the first portion of the survey to gather background material on

the participant and district represented by the respondent. The first question of the survey

requested the board member to indicate if they had participated in a superintendent

hiring process. If the participant selected no, then the survey ended and no additional

data was collected, as the participant did not qualify to be in the study.

Other questions were formatted to determine the respondent's perceptions of how

the board as a whole make hiring decisions, as well as how he/she made decisions

individually. There were six questions related to the characteristics or demographics of

the board member, as well as a question related to the demographics of the district in

which they serve. Other questions were asked about the process each board uses to

conduct the superintendent hiring process, including whether or not they use a search

firm. Participants were also asked to rank the 10 PSEL Standards according to their

opinion regarding order of importance. A follow-up question was asked, after the

ranking process, for the board member to explain their ranking decision to promote

understanding of the participant (Patton, 2015).

Face-to-face interviews. The second phase of the data collection consisted of

follow-up semi-structured interviews with three board members who had exemplar

information considered worthy of further exploration; the three interview participants

each belong to one of the following categories: a smaller rural district, a larger urban

district, and a district that has used an external search firm. Willis (1999) states (as cited

in Patton 2015, p. 424) "interviews aim to decipher the thought process involved in

answering survey questions to increase validity and reliability." Through the use of semi-

scripted verbal probing techniques as described in Willis (1999), the researcher asked

"other specific information relevant to the survey questions" to gather more in-depth

information (p. 5-6). The verbal probing, both semi-scripted and spontaneous, allowed

for the researcher to gather "an interchange of spontaneous thoughts and critiques" that may not have been apparent in the survey questioning (Willis, 1999. p. 6). The purpose of the interviews was to understand individual perspectives, deepen understanding of hiring experiences, generate rich, descriptive data, and gather insights into participants' thinking with some flexibility in questioning (Matthews, 2015; Rossman & Rallis, 2017). The semi-structured interview questions can be found in Appendix F.

Follow-up questions were asked, as necessary, to elicit elaborations and clarification (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). An email request as shown in Appendix E, was sent to the three participants who belonged to the designed categories, agreed to be interviewed by leaving their name and contact information on the initial survey, and were chosen because they had reflective answers of interest to the researcher for more follow-up questioning. Interviews were scheduled through email and occurred in late November 2018 after the survey data collection was completed. The interviews occurred at a time convenient to the board member and all chose to conduct the interviews at the Northwest Education Service Cooperative office after closing hours as a neutral site. All interviews were recorded on an electronic recording device and the researcher took notes during the interview to aid in credibility (Patton, 2015). After the interviews were complete, the recording was uploading into a transcribing site (Rev.com) and transcribed verbatim for later analyzation.

Reflexivity

Cohen and Crabtree (2006) define reflexivity as "an attitude of attending systematically to the context of knowledge construction, especially to the effect of the researcher, at every step of the research process" (para 1). According to Patton (2015)

reflexivity is "experimental, interpersonal and in-depth in nature" (p. 70). Berger (2013) noted the importance of reflexivity in research as "commonly viewed as the process of a continual internal dialogue and self-evaluation of the researcher's positionality" and how the position may affect the outcome of the research (p. 220). As the instrument in a qualitative study, the researcher must recognize, reflect on, and set aside any pre-conceptions during the study (Guillemin & Gillam, 2013).

According to Cohen and Crabtree (2006, para 8), I was the "human research instrument" and conducted this study with professional and unbiased perspectives. It was my obligation to make the reader aware of my strategies for quality control from my experiences, both person and professional. From personal experience in the hiring process of a superintendent myself, I have witnessed predetermined outcomes from local school boards. As I self-reflect on the experiences observed from first-hand knowledge of the hiring process of a superintendent, I recognize my experiences or biases may have an influence on the study if they are not explored and expressed.

My professional experiences helped guide me to understand the process when hiring other personnel and has led to my interest in this research. My rapport with the current local superintendents, the professional training I have in the areas of school board relations, business office management and finance, my formal education as an elementary educator (BS degree) and an educational leader (MS, Ed.S and Ed.D coursework), my belief in and adherence to professional ethical behavior, and the understanding of and relationships with school board members and superintendents throughout my career allowed me to gather data and interpret the findings with a clear and non-biased approach. Because I have worked at a district level position as an assistant

superintendent and now an assistant director of an Educational Service Cooperative, I view the knowledge and expertise through a reflective lens without influence from others. As I collected, analyzed, and interpreted data, I was aware of these factors and worked to eliminate both personal and professional bias through the recognition of the influence of my experiences as well as through other credibility efforts outlined below.

Trustworthiness

In order to ensure trustworthiness, rigor, and quality in a qualitative study, a discussion of credibility is important (Golafshani, 2003). Trustworthiness is how qualitative researchers work to ensure credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability of findings (Schwandt, Lincoln & Guba, 2007). Patton (2015) described systematic analysis strategies to enhance credibility in qualitative research, indicating that "integrating and triangulating diverse sources of data" such as interviews, observations, and survey questions is important. Patton (2015, p. 660) went on to say, "consistency of finding across types of data increases confidence in the confirmed patterns and themes."

As Matthew (2015) noted, triangulation involves using multiple methods to collect data on the same topic and that triangulation "heightens qualitative methods" (p. 88). In this study, the researcher helped establish trustworthiness through triangulation of sources—collecting data in more than one way. This included a multiple choice and open response survey including the demographics, which may have determined information as observed by individual board members and their perceptions of how they and their colleagues make collective group decisions. The survey also asked participants to rank of the professional leadership standards and explain their rankings, which helped clarify the criteria school board members described as important to the hiring process. The personal

interviews allowed for clarification and more in-depth follow-up of specific questions of interest. Using multiple methods of inquiry allowed for "corroboration and converging evidence" (Matthews, 2015, p. 67). The data from these multiple sources were analyzed to determine patterns through the voice of the participants, and these insights in patterns and authenticity from the participants assisted the researcher in answering the research questions to the proposed study allowing for trustworthiness and credibility to the study.

Data Analysis

As noted in Patton (2015), analyzing data into findings to determine what it reveals to the researcher, is deemed qualitative in nature and important to this study. The survey responses were reviewed and categorized as to their relevance to the research questions. The first portion of the survey was primarily demographic information to assist the researcher in gathering background information and to categorize into potential themes that were connected to specific research questions. Closed-ended survey responses (such as multiple choice) were analyzed using frequency counts and considered descriptive in nature (no statistical analysis was conducted). Open-ended survey responses and interview data were analyzed to look for patterns, themes, or reoccurring content that might exist (Patton, 2015). Specifically, content analysis and inductive analysis were used to "search for or count reoccurring words, phrases or themes" in the answers (Patton, 2015, p. 541). Patton (2015, p. 541) noted content analysis takes the material collected and "attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings." The interview information was examined and cross-referenced with the field notes for accuracy or additional documentation that was of relevance to the study.

Both the survey and interview responses were categorized in an electronic document containing similar words, themes, or patterns. These "like themes" were categorized into patterns for content analysis and determined to what extent the data in this study supported the research questions noted (Patton, 2015). Because "a single piece of data by itself carries no real meaning." It is suggested in Rossman and Rallis (2017) to "assign meaning to the pieces by label, code, and categorizing to find patterns and themes" (p. 227) to this data, while keeping research questions in mind.

Summary

This qualitative study examined the criteria school boards use to make decisions about whom they hire for the position of superintendent and if or how the educational leadership standards were formally considered in the hiring process. This chapter described the methodology, including the instruments used to conduct the research. The study utilized surveys and interviews to collect data from current schoolboard members in Northwest Arkansas. Closed-ended survey responses (such as multiple choice) were analyzed using frequency counts. Open-ended survey responses and interview data were analyzed to look for patterns, themes or reoccurring content that might exist (Patton, 2015).

Chapter 4

Findings

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore individual Northwest Arkansas school board members' perceptions of criteria for hiring practices and review if or how this aligns with the professional educational leadership standards. This research study reviewed the hiring practices in the Northwest Arkansas Education Service Cooperative area (which includes 97 school board members).

The first chapter of this study outlined and included the purpose of the study, with terms and definitions necessary to understand the information with more clarity. The literature review and the theoretical framework that guided the study were included in the second chapter. The third chapter defined the methodology of the study as well as the data collection process. This chapter will outline the findings of the study concerning the hiring practices of Northwest Arkansas School Board members and the alignment of the educational leadership standards.

The findings for this research were collected and analyzed through survey responses from the web hosted electronic survey from SurveyMonkey and interview follow-ups to seek to answer to the following guiding research questions for this study which were as follows:

1. What characteristics do school board members consider when hiring superintendents for their school districts?

2. How are the professional educational leadership standards used by school boards in the hiring process?

3. How do the professional educational leadership standards compare to current hiring practice criteria?

Sample

Survey respondents. From the 97 Northwest Arkansas school board members that responded to the survey, one person declined to participate, 70 did not respond, and 26 completed the survey (26.8%). Of the 26 completed surveys, 16 participants who completed the survey (62%) stated they were involved in the hiring of a superintendent and 11 (42%) stated they had never hired a superintendent. Those 11 school board members that had never been involved in the hiring process of a superintendent were excluded from the study. Therefore, 16 of the 97 Northwest Arkansas school board members (16%) provided the data that was reviewed, analyzed, and reported for this study.

Questions one through nine of the survey gathered demographic information, which was compiled in Table 2. This information was collected in order to describe and understand the background information of the school board members in the Northwest Arkansas region and generally came from multiple choice questions only.

The average board member in this study served on the board of their current district for seven years; the longest time served was 18 years, and the shortest time served was one year. School board members from smaller school districts (<3,000 students) school districts had a higher survey completing rate (47%) than board members from the other size school districts. Most participants (60%) had a four-year degree or Master's degree. More than half (56%) were female, and all 16 participants (100%) who responded were white or Caucasian and not Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish ethnicity. The

average age range of the Northwest Arkansas board members was between 40-60 years old. As for the use of a standard set of criteria for hiring a superintendent, 63% of the participants indicated they did not have a predetermined protocol. Finally, the majority (75%) of the 16 participants noted their districts did not use a search firm to hire a superintendent.

Table 2
School Board Demographics of Northwest Arkansas

	Value Label	N	% of Total (N=16)
Size of District in students			
	Very small (<1,000)	2	1%
	Small (1,000-3,000)	7	47%
	Medium (3,001-10,000)	1	<1%
	Large (10,001-15,000)	3	2%
	Very Large (>15,000)	2	1%
Levels of Education			
	<High School Diploma	0	0%
	High School Diploma/GED	2	1%
	Some college, no degree	1	<1%
	2 yr. college degree	2	1%
	4 yr. college degree	4	27%
	Master's degree	5	33%
	Doctoral degree	0	0%
	Professional (JD, MD)	1	<1%
Gender			
	Female	9	56%
	Male	7	44%
	Other	0	0%
Ethnicity/Race			
	Not Hispanic	16	100%
	White/Caucasian	16	100%
Age Range			
	18-29	0	0%
	30-39	4	25%
	40-49	6	38%
	50-59	6	38%
	60-69	0	0%
	70+	0	0%

Standard Criteria Used

	Yes	6	38%
	No	10	63%
Search Firm Used			
	Yes	4	25%
	No	12	75%

Note: Data in this table obtained from research survey

Interview respondents. Three school board members were interviewed from those that participated in the survey process and gave their name and contact information for follow-up interviews. There were five board members that agreed to an interview; however, only three were chosen and contacted based on their school size—one from small school (less than 3,000 students), one from a larger school size (between 10,001 and 15,000 students), and one board member from a large district (more than 15,000 students) that had used an external search firm for the superintendent hiring process. The three interview participants were given pseudonyms to preserve the confidentiality of participants or specific school districts. Table 3 denotes the number of superintendents each interviewee has hired during their tenure. Most notable in Table 3 is that none of the three board members interviewed had any training on superintendent hiring practices or protocol.

Table 3
Interview Participants' Hiring Demographics

	Value Label	N	% of Total (N=3)
Number of Superintendents hired			
	1	1	33%
	2	1	33%
	3	1	33%
Trained on hiring practices			
	Yes	0	0%
	No	3	100%

Note: Data in this table obtained from research interviews

The first interviewee, Mr. Smith, was from the smaller school district and has been on the board for 12 years, the most veteran of the three interviewed. Mr. Smith has a four-year college degree, is 30-39 years of age, and has been involved with hiring three superintendents over his tenure. Mr. Smith and I have previously had a professional working relationship. Mr. Smith appeared somewhat nervous at first, but then became more relaxed with the questioning process. He was careful with his responses and yet appeared to be confident in his answers. When asked approximately how many superintendents over his 12 years had he hired in his district, Mr. Smith responded: "Uh, since I've been on, I believe three superintendents." It should be noted an additional interim superintendent was hired under his term as well for a total of four. When asked about any training he had on the superintendent hiring process, Mr. Smith stated he had not had any trainings; however, he went on to say,

> I've been through the course of the uh new school board training and uh, have taken that and, and I think there's some other uh, things online available through the School Board Association website. But I, I don't think I have taken those. I've done, I've done several classes online, but I don't think any of those were the superintendent hiring.

The second interview participant, Mrs. Argo, was from a large school district of 10,001-15,000 students. She has been on the board for two years and holds a Master's Degree. She is 40-49 years of age. I had never met Mrs. Argo prior to the interview process. Mrs. Argo came into the interview with confidence, yet was very soft spoken. Her responses were careful and thoughtful. She was extremely calculated in her answers so as not to give information she was not allowed to disclose concerning personnel. She had been involved in hiring one superintendent, and she noted it was "kind of an emergency situation and not anticipated." Mrs. Argo discussed her training as the normal

new board member and other trainings "through the ASBA and NSBA around superintendent-board relationships, which briefly covered hiring, but no, I don't feel like there's any [trainings] about the hiring process." She did state if she had expected the hiring process, she "might have been differently prepared or differently prepared myself."

The third and final interview participant was a board member named Mr. Dennis, who was from a very large school district of more than 15,000 students and had used a search firm in his hiring of a superintendent experience. Mr. Dennis has been on the board for three years, is in the range of 60-69 years of age, and has a four-year college degree. I had never met Mr. Dennis prior to our interview session. Mr. Dennis was extremely confident, assertive, and opinionated with his responses. From Mr. Dennis's responses, I would have speculated he had been a veteran school board member for many years had he not informed me of his years' experience on the board during the interview. Mr. Dennis was elected and arrived on his board just as their superintendent resigned mid-year to move to another school district, and his board had to start the hiring process due to that resignation. When asked about his training on school board hiring practices, he had a lengthy response:

> We brought in a national search firm, um, after the resignation of the superintendent. Um, it, it was, um, uh, an unusual experience, I think, in that we ... The, the national search firm told us very clearly, 'We are going to bring you the best people out there.' Um, we are a ... I think we are an affluent, rapidly growing large district with significant resources so our expectation was that we look at the best possible candidates to bring in someone very talented. Um, the search firm repeatedly and clearly told us that they were bringing, uh, the best possible national candidates. And then, they brought us, uh, 10 finalists. And to be quite honest with you, it was, um, a pretty apparent pretty quickly to us that the 10 were not what we were looking for. Um, uh, I, I just think that ... I- They brought us candidates, um, that we weren't sure would really understand Arkansas. And maybe not understand southern life. And what I mean by that is if you're looking at a candidate from Maine or Vermont or, or Pennsylvania, um, they may have the right academic credentials, but are they really going to, um, understand life in a

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relatively small southern town? Um, we ... When the search firm brought us 10 finalists, they, they included, um, video interviews with each. So, we sat in a room and, you know, each resume would be put in front of us. And then we would look at the, um, video from each candidate. And we looked at 10 of those. And I think clearly at that point, we felt we weren't seeing ... The goal was to look at the 10 resumes and 10 videos and cut to three finalists who would be invited into town for interviews. But after viewing the 10, um, we felt we were not seeing what we were looking for. And I'll be honest, since you're not using my name, I, I remember during that session, a board member ... Another board member and I looked at each other and we both had the very same thought was ... "And this is their best?

Research Question I: Characteristics

The first research question in this study was: What characteristics do school board members consider when hiring superintendents for their school districts? The data from surveys and interviews related to this research question are provided below.

Survey responses. The first few questions on the survey attempted to narrow down the characteristics, qualities, or criteria school boards consider when hiring superintendents for their districts. Survey questions 10, 11, 12, and 15 asked the participants: What criteria or characteristics do you PERSONALLY use when hiring a superintendent? Does your board have a standardized set of criteria or characteristics they use when hiring a district superintendent? What criteria or characteristics does your board use when hiring a district superintendent? In your opinion, what are the three most important attributes or characteristics of a superintendent you would consider when hiring?

When responding to the question concerning top three characteristics (Q15), the identifying patterns that arose throughout the survey were school board members were generally interested in leaders that were ethical, honest, and had integrity or good character. Comments made by the participants surveyed also mentioned the

superintendent should have "an understanding of school finance or budgeting." It was also noted at least seven times that it was important for top candidates to have prior experience in the leadership field. The survey participants mentioned specifically those who had been previous superintendents or those who were a "proven" the leader was of importance. From the views of those surveyed, education or educational training was important as a leadership characteristic for those candidates striving for the top leadership roles.

In analyzing responses from survey questions 10, 12, and 15, it was clear that the participants believed leaders should be community minded, have a vision or align with the board's vision, show concern for the community, and fit the district or community in which they are seeking the position. Examples of the comments stated were: "their goals align with the board" and "their views fit the mission of the district." These comments align with the Person-Fit Theory which guided this research and indicate "fit" is an important quality from many of the participants' views.

Question 11 simply asked if the board had a formal set of criteria or standards in which they use consistently to hire a superintendent. As noted in Table 2, 10 of the 16 (63%) responded no and six of the 16 stated yes (38%). When asked to describe how the boards determine the criteria they use to hire superintendents (Q12), comments included "we discuss as a group using our special expertise to the table to come to a decision" and "it's a team effort, with respect for each other." The four participants (25%) that stated their boards used a search firm noted the external firms led the boards through a process to determine their criteria or characteristics and acted as a "middle man" to narrow down the process. Those board members that mentioned a search firm was used for the hiring

process indicated overwhelmingly that the process the firm used was to "collect data concerning criteria or needs, screen candidates, review the top videos and then finally interview the top two or three."

Interview responses. The first few questions in the interview portion of the study attempted to narrow down the characteristics, qualities, or criteria school boards consider when hiring superintendents for their districts. Questions 3, 4, and 6 in the interview process discussed the characteristics or criteria each board member considered when interviewing and then hiring a candidate for superintendent. Question 3 asked: What are your board's expectations for a superintendent? How does the board determine those expectations? Question 4 asked: What do you personally see as the most important characteristic a superintendent must possess in a leadership role? Why? and finally in question 6, the interviewees were asked to discuss the criteria (if any) their board uses to hire a superintendent, and how that criteria was determined (e.g., Do you just ask general interview questions or do you have a standardized list of priorities or leadership qualities your district considers? Do you discuss the criteria in advance of a hiring?).

The most common characteristic that came up multiple times in the interview data was that the superintendent should fit the of needs of the district or community in which they were to be hired. For example, Mr. Smith stated:

> I think a better fit for our school district. Um, you know I think that's another important thing is how, how that superintendent's gonna fit in with your, your district, your town. Um, I think, you know there's a, there's just a lot of, a lot of people are sometimes when, you know some of the people we even interview during that process, you know you can tell that they just, they just wouldn't fit for your school or your town.

Mr. Smith went on to identify that characteristics he believed to be most important for a superintendent to possess were that of experience and getting along with others:

> …how they treat employees, and it's important that get along with or work with those in the community. If you've got somebody that just really doesn't fit in with your community, then it's not gonna, it's not gonna work. It's, there's gonna be a lot of turmoil.

Mr. Smith suggested if the superintendent had the qualifications but did not fit with the board, community or staff "that just doesn't work." Mr. Smith went on to say it would be a disadvantage to the superintendent to not fit with the board or community.

Mrs. Argo also noted:

> You might look specifically for someone who you know- who you know knows your district. So, I feel like those- to me, the-the district's needs get the most air time. The group's perception of the district's needs get the most airtime, as opposed to an-an outside list of complications.

When asked about characteristics his board determined to be important, Mr. Dennis was the only school board member interviewed that stated a set of criteria [characteristics] was determined when working through the hiring process of a superintendent. Mr. Dennis, whose district used a search firm, described that the search firm group led the board through the process of determining a set of characteristics or criteria his board considered important. Both of the other two board members stated they as a board entity discussed and agreed upon criteria or characteristics during the pre-hiring process before determining what they were looking for in their candidates, but did not have a standard set of criteria. All three of the board members interviewed mentioned the superintendents currently holding the position in their districts were in-district hires

and each was promoted to the position based on the needs of the district at the time of hire.

When asked the same questions (3, 4, 6) to Mrs. Argo, she said her board

did not have like this is the thing that some previous board has established and you're responsible to hire according to these criteria, no. I think- I mean, one of the main, one of the central roles of being a board member is hiring and supervising superintendents. Um, and so I think that there is a- some degree of perception that like we've been elected because the community trusts our judgment on those matters. I think, um, the- the criteria that come up, I think, have to do with the district's needs. You might look specifically for someone who you know- who you know knows your district. So, I feel like those- to me, the-the district's needs get the most air time. The group's perception of the district's needs get the most airtime, as opposed to an-an outside list of complications.

Interview questions 9, 10 and 11 where about search firm hiring protocol and practice. The only interviewee that discussed search firms was Mr. Dennis. Mr. Dennis discussed the criteria the search firm assisted them in developing and he said

We were handed reams of paper with like 1,000 like criteria to run a school district. I don't think you should need hundreds of criteria to understand what you think your district needs. Um, but yes. That search firm did put like reams of criteria checklists in front of us.

Mr. Dennis did say a board needed generally three or four criteria and then stated them as "out in the community as the face of the community, managing and structuring administration, policies issues that track how your district is doing, and finally to protect mediocrity, meaning don't accept less than high performing." Mr. Dennis did reference that the search firm pressed for a superintendent candidate with a doctorate and the board had not considered that as a need or skillset. He did make a comment that a priority in his district was to "grow your own for future hires" and his district did not hire from the search firm's recommended top ten candidates, but from within the district.

Finally, in the interviews, all of the three participants mentioned it was important for a superintendent to have experience in school finance. For example, Mr. Smith stated:

> Their ability with finances. And that has always been very high on my list…it's very important…if I had to say a single uh most important thing it, it would be finances, just because they [finances] are so important and, you know just so much to them [finances].

Mr. Dennis commented in the interview about finances being an important part of the superintendent's job and stated "we [his district] are big enough …you should have a money person. In a lot of districts, the superintendent is also the CFO."

Overall results for Research Question 1. Based on the data from these participants interviewed, it appears school board members look for candidates with skills such as a background in finance, candidates who were experienced as an educational leader, and candidates who were aligned with the vision of the board or "fit" with the board or with the "needs of the district." All three of the personal interviews mentioned the superintendent had to "fit with their districts or boards."

Research Question 2: The PSEL Standards

The second research question in this study was: How are the professional educational leadership standards used by school boards in the hiring process? The data from surveys and interviews related to this research question are provided below.

Survey responses. The three survey questions that addressed information concerning the PSEL Standards were Questions 14, 16 and 17. Question 14 asked the participants: Are you aware or have you heard of the professional educator standards such as ISLLC or PSEL, 12 participants stated they had not heard of these standards

(46%). The few board members (n=4) that did note in the survey they had heard or were

aware of the educational standards mentioned "the search firm used them" and "we use it

in our business, as well as I'm a former educator."

Survey question 16 went on to ask the board members to rank the Professional

Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL, 2015) from 1-10, with the ranking of one (1)

as being the most important to them (Table 4). Fifteen of the 16 survey participants

completed this task. The ranking portion of this survey had only one of the 15

participants that ranked it in exact order, noting the standards listed were "of equal

importance." In response to question 17, which was "Why did you rank them in this

order?", seven of the 15 school board members who participated in the ranking portion

of the survey stated the standards were difficult to rank and all appear to be of "equal

importance"; similar answers included "all important and hard to rank," "hard to rank the

most critical," "all high priorities and hard to rank," "similar in priority," and "would

have put a few in the same priority, but the survey required us to choose rank order."

Other comments of choice included "personal preference," "individual qualities were

picked first," and the choices were "philosophical and not typical in the day or life of a

superintendent."

Table 4 shows the 10 PSEL standards, the rankings by each of the 15 participants

that completed that portion of the survey, as well as the overall rank order with the

percentages noted. The PSEL standard that ranked as first was the one listed first in

order on the survey, "Effective educational leaders develop, advocate, and enact a shared

mission, vision, and core values of high-quality education and academic success and

well-being of each student" (PSEL, 2015), with six of the 15 participants (40%) selecting

this standard as most important. The other nine PSEL Standards were ranked similarly; however, eight of the 15 (53%) ranked the standard "Effective educational leaders act as agents of continuous improvement to promote each student's academic success and well-being" as being number 10, not of importance, when hiring. These standards were noted as important to those surveyed; however, were not a part of the consideration directly in the hiring process of a superintendent.

Table 4
Rankings of the PSEL from survey

PSEL	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Ranking		
Effective educational leaders develop, advocate, and enact a shared mission, vision, and core values of high-quality education and academic success and well-being of each student.	3	1	1	2	6	2	1	1	6	1	10	5	1	4	5	1	6	40%
																2	2	13%
																3	1	7%
																4	1	7%
																5	2	13%
																6	2	13%
																7	0	0%
																8	0	0%
																9	0	0%
																10	1	7%

PSEL	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Ranking		
Effective educational leaders act ethically and according to professional norms to promote each student's academic success and well-being.	4	4	2	1	2	1	2	2	1	3	8	8	3	2	1	1	4	27%
																2	5	33%
																3	2	13%
																4	2	13%
																5	0	0%
																6	0	0%
																7	0	0%
																8	2	13%
																9	0	0%
																10	0	0%

PSEL	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Ranking		
Effective educational leaders strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote each student's academic success and well-being.	5	6	3	3	5	9	6	3	4	4	7	9	8	3	4	1	0	0%
																2	0	0%
																3	4	27%
																4	3	20%
																5	2	13%
																6	2	13%
																7	1	7%
																8	1	7%
																9	2	13%
																10	0	0%

PSEL	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Ranking		
Effective educational leaders develop and support intellectually rigorous and coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to promote each student's academic success and well-being.	10	3	4	8	3	7	3	10	5	9	1	10	9	1	2	1	2	13%
																2	1	7%
																3	3	20%
																4	1	7%
																5	1	7%
																6	0	0%
																7	1	7%
																8	1	7%
																9	2	13%
																10	3	20%

PSEL	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Ranking		
Effective educational leaders cultivate an inclusive, caring, and supportive school community that promotes the academic success and well-being of each student.	7	7	5	4	7	3	8	5	7	5	9	7	5	8	3	1	0	0%
																2	0	0%
																3	2	13%
																4	1	7%
																5	4	27%
																6	0	0%
																7	5	33%
																8	2	13%
																9	1	7%
																10	0	0%

Table 4
Rankings of the PSEL from survey (continued)

PSEL	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Ranking		
Effective educational leaders develop the professional capacity and practice of school personnel to promote each student's academic success and well-being.	1	2	6	5	8	4	7	4	2	6	2	2	10	6	6	1	1	7%
																2	4	27%
																3	0	0%
																4	2	13%
																5	1	7%
																6	4	27%
																7	1	7%
																8	1	7%
																9	0	0%
																10	1	7%

PSEL	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Ranking		
Effective educational leaders foster a professional community of teachers and other professional staff to promote each student's academic success and well-being	9	10	7	7	1	5	5	6	3	7	3	3	4	7	8	1	1	7%
																2	0	0%
																3	3	20%
																4	1	7%
																5	2	13%
																6	1	7%
																7	4	27%
																8	1	7%
																9	1	7%
																10	1	7%

PSEL	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Ranking		
Effective educational leaders engage families and the community in meaningful, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial ways to promote each student's academic success and well-being.	8	8	8	6	9	6	9	8	8	8	4	4	6	5	7	1	0	0%
																2	0	0%
																3	0	0%
																4	2	13%
																5	1	7%
																6	3	20%
																7	1	7%
																8	6	40%
																9	2	13%
																10	0	0%

PSEL	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Ranking		
Effective educational leaders manage school operations and resources to promote each student's academic success and well-being.	2	5	9	9	4	8	10	9	9	2	5	1	2	9	9	1	1	7%
																2	3	20%
																3	0	0%
																4	1	7%
																5	2	13%
																6	0	0%
																7	0	0%
																8	1	7%
																9	6	40%
																10	1	7%

PSEL	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Ranking		
Effective educational leaders act as agents of continuous improvement to promote each student's academic success and well-being.	6	9	10	10	10	10	4	7	10	10	6	6	7	10	10	1	0	0%
																2	0	0%
																3	0	0%
																4	1	7%
																5	0	0%
																6	3	20%
																7	2	13%
																8	0	0%
																9	1	7%
																10	8	53%

Interview responses. The interview question that assisted in gathering information related to the use of the PSEL standards in the hiring process was Question 7: Are you familiar with the ISLLC or PSEL Standards? Describe briefly. How (if at all) do the standards come into consideration during the hiring process?

Regarding his knowledge of the PSEL standards, Mr. Smith said he had heard of these sets of leadership standards prior to the survey but "not probably…. as much as I should." Mr. Smith ranked the standard "an effective leader fosters a professional

community of teachers and other professional staff to promote each student's academic success and well-being" as most important. Smith stated he ranked the standards in the order he did, noting:

> I felt like some of the options were very close to each other. The important duty of the superintendent is to lead the district as a whole. His or her leadership should guide the teachers and staff, which ultimately should guide and encourage student achievement.

When asked about her knowledge or familiarity of the PSEL standards, Mrs. Argo was extremely aware due to her teaching experience of 10 years and her husband is employed in higher education. Mrs. Argo stated she "felt leadership is something that I- that I care about. Um, and figuring out how to do that well is important to me." When ranking the PSEL standards, Mrs. Argo chose "act ethically and according to professional norms to promote each student's academic success and well-being" as the most important choice. When asked why she ranked the characteristics in the order she did, Mrs. Argo stated,

> All 10 are vital, and can be prioritized well in lots of different ways. Without personal ethics, a superintendent is untrustworthy and corrupts the mission and vision of an entire district and all of its relationships, so I started with that. Then I prioritized academics because that is the special mission of education. I don't think you get far in academic growth without creating positive professional and student environments. Management of budget, etc. are crucial, but everything can't come first.

Finally, Mr. Dennis stated he was not sure if he was aware of the PSEL standards. While ranking the 10 PSEL standards, Mr. Dennis ranked number one as "an education leader should develop and support intellectually rigorous and coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to promote each student's academic success and well-being." He stated on the survey that the ranking was "somewhat philosophic

statements like this probably don't entirely reflect the day to day life of the superintendent."

Overall results for Research Question 2: Based on the data from these participants, it appears many (75%) of school board members in this study were not aware of the PSEL standards specifically, but many of them valued the content of the standards and felt all 10 of the standards were "of similar importance and difficult to rank." It was clear from the interviews the board members were aware of leadership skills mentioned in the educational leadership standards, but they did not necessarily know them by name, such as PSEL. The board members agreed in general that the standards listed in the survey (i.e., the 10 PSEL standards) were similar to the criteria their board determined as important for the hiring process or qualities a superintendent should possess. The standard consistently ranked the highest was "the educational leaders develop, advocate, and enact a shared mission, vision, and core values of high-quality education and academic success and well-being of each student." The standard consistently ranked lowest was "the educational leader was responsible for continuous improvement to promote each student's academic success and well-being."

Research Question 3: Hiring alignment

The third research question in this evaluation was: How do the professional educational leadership standards compare to current hiring practice criteria? The data from surveys and interviews related to this research question are provided below.

Survey responses. The survey did not ask a specific question directly attempting to show alignment of the use of the standards with the hiring process. The researcher used the survey questions and followed up with the face to face interviews to conclude

alignment or non-alignment. It was determined from the questions on characteristics (survey questions 10, 12, and 15) the participants used similar key words or phrases also used in the PSEL standards, such as "the superintendent needs to fit with the district or board's vision" or "the superintendent should act in an ethical manner." The educational leadership standards were recognized by survey respondents as good leadership qualities for the most part; however, 46% of the 16 surveyed board members indicated they had not been aware of these leadership standards or did not consider these standard directly when hiring a superintendent. Sixty-three percent (63%) of the Northwest Arkansas school board members surveyed stated they had no set of formal criteria used by their individual board of directors when hiring a superintendent (see Table 2).

Interview responses. The researcher concluded through common answers in the interviews that two of the three (66%) of the board members who were interviewed were not aware of the educational leadership standards in general; however, all were aware of some language used in the standards as good leadership qualities. The board members mentioned many of the leadership qualities noted in the standards are important qualities or characteristics superintendents should possess; however, they did not consider them as the focus of the hire. For example, Mrs. Argo mentioned "these [PSEL standards] are things that- that there isn't anything on here that we don't regularly discuss and that isn't a part of the conversation around hiring someone. But we aren't- these [PSEL standards] aren't… our starting point." It stood to reason that qualifications, such as certification or leadership skills were not a priority in the hiring process more than fitting the needs of the district or fitting in with the community.

Overall results for Research Question 3

Forty-six percent (46%) of the survey participants indicated they were not aware of the PSEL leadership standards, and more than half (63%) of the school board members surveyed indicated they had no formal standard criteria for hiring a superintendent. Further, all three interview participants confirmed the language used in the standards were characteristics used to determine qualities of district leaders, though two of the three (66%) board members interviewed had not heard of or been aware of the standards. The researcher concluded key characteristics described in the survey findings and common language from the interviews were similar terms used in the leadership standards and were almost interchangeable; however, it was also evident based on the data in this study that the leadership standards were not used in the hiring practices for district level leaders as ranked.

Summary

Chapter 4 summarized the findings of this study based on data gathered through electronic survey and face to face interviewing. The 16 districts in the Northwest Arkansas Education Service Cooperative region consists of 98 individual school board members. For this study 97 school board members were sent requests to survey and 26 responded. Sixteen school board members indicated they had been involved in the hiring process of a superintendent. From the 16 final participants, three members were interviewed face to face for more detail or clarification of information. The survey and interviews were cross referenced, analyzed, and coded for similar evidence indicating the criteria of hiring a superintendent of schools and the alignment of the educational leadership standards. The characteristics most noted in the findings by the participants were: superintendent candidates should have a good understanding of school finance, be

ethical, and be a good communicator. It was determined from the data that the board

members surveyed were not aware of the educational standards but were aware of the

language and terms used in written format presented in the survey. These standards were

not directly or formally used as criteria for hiring and 63% of the board members

indicated they had no predetermined criteria for hiring a district leader. There were

themes or words that were similar in both the discussions from the survey and interviews

that indicated the board members understood portions of the educational standards as

quality characteristics of leadership; however, they did not reference or consider them as

a whole set of hiring criteria specifically.

Chapter 5

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore individual

Northwest Arkansas school board members' perceptions of criteria for hiring practices

and review if or how this aligns with the professional educational leadership standards.

The study examined the criteria and qualifications for the job of superintendent, as

determined by various school board members, with a focus in the Northwest Arkansas

region, through the surveys of 16 of the 97 Northwest Arkansas school board members

and the interviews of three of the 16 school board members surveyed.

The guiding research questions for this study were as follows:

1. What characteristics do school board members consider when hiring
   superintendents for their school districts?
2. How are the professional educational leadership standards used by school boards
   in the hiring process?
3. How do the professional educational leadership standards compare to current
   hiring practice criteria?

Summary of Findings

This study investigated three questions that examined the hiring practices of

school boards in the Northwest Arkansas region. The three key topics studied were

school board hiring characteristics for superintendents, knowledge of the educational

leadership standards, and the alignment of the leadership standards with hiring practices.

In regards to Research Question 1 (What characteristics do school board members

consider when hiring superintendents for their school districts?), the data suggested

school board members look for candidates with skills such as those with a background in

school finance as the top quality or characteristic. Candidates that were "proven" and experienced educational leaders or former district leaders ranked as top criteria, as well. Throughout the findings it was noted a district leader who was ethical, honest, and had integrity were top qualities school boards looked for when considering a candidate for superintendent. Finally, "fitting the needs of the district" appeared numerous times as an important criteria for hiring.

The second research question in this study was "How are the professional educational leadership standards used by school boards in the hiring process?" The data gathered from the survey and interviews determined school board members were not aware of the PSEL standards as written or discussed in both the survey or interviews; however, the respondents stated these standards were general leadership characteristics or qualities they could use for hiring a superintendent. The interviews helped clarify that the educational leadership standards were not considered in the hiring process, however, school board members did consider that candidates should "fit the needs of the district" or "fit with the vision of the board."

The final research question was "How do the professional educational leadership standards compare to current hiring practice criteria?" The leadership qualities and criteria noted in the educational leadership standards did appear to be recognized qualities of good leaders by many of the participants; however, the PSEL standards were not considered in hiring practices by school boards. The board members discussed many of the standards ranked as qualities they "found important" for a good and qualified superintendent candidate; however, they were not aware of these standards as written or ranked for this study.

Discussion and Conclusions

This study explored Northwest Arkansas School Board members' perceptions of characteristics they find important when hiring a superintendent as compared to the professional leadership standards. Three major findings of the study related to: (a) board members knowledge and use of the PSEL standards in the hiring process, (b) the idea that "fit" matters when hiring a superintendent, and (c) the need for pre-developed protocols for hiring.

Board Members' Knowledge and Use of PSEL Standards in Hiring

In this study, two research questions focused on school board members' knowledge of and use of the PSEL standards in their hiring practices for a district leader. The survey had one question that simply asked the participant if they were aware of the PSEL standards and then another question that asked them to rank the 10 standards as to their importance and explain their rankings.

Knowledge of PSEL Standards. The findings indicated (46%) of the participants in this study had no knowledge of the PSEL standards. When presented with the standards on the survey, participants noted the standards reflected language many considered important information concerning leadership qualities. For example, the vocabulary used in PSEL Standard 1 and 2 is (emphasis added): Effective educational leaders:

1. Develop, advocate, and enact a shared mission, ***vision,*** and ***core values*** of high-quality education

2. ***Act ethically*** and according to professional norms. The bolded/italicized terms are examples of similar words used by the participants discussing characteristics

they look for in a district leader. However, about half of respondents did not

know about the existence of PSEL standards.

Because school boards are elected community members and not educators for the

most part, it is reasonable to conclude board members would not commonly be informed

of these standards outside of their participation on the board. Those research participants

(n=4) that did indicate they were aware of the PESL standards, commonly had ties to

education in some form—for example, as a former teacher or in work with higher

education. A few participants were familiar with the standards because of their

experience with using a search firm through the hiring process. However, an important

revelation from these findings remains that about half of school board members in this

study were not aware of the national standards that articulate the expectations of effective

educational leaders, which includes the superintendents whom they hire.

Use of PSEL standards in hiring. Since the research focused on the standards as

they relate to school board hiring practices, and because the data showed 46% of the

participants were not aware of the PSEL standards, it is reasonable to conclude board

members in this study did not consider using the PSEL standards in hiring practices.

The survey asked participants to rank the PSEL standards from one (most

important) to ten (least important). The results of the rankings showed the standard most

frequently ranked as the most important was: "Effective educational leaders develop,

advocate, and enact a shared mission, vision, and core values of high-quality education

and academic success and well-being of every student" (40% of participants ranked this

as their top choice). The standard ranked lowest (53%) was: "Effective educational

leaders act as agents of continuous improvement to promote each student's academic

success and well-being." Interestingly, the two standards that promote community and finance, which were the also the two characteristics mentioned most by respondents as important qualities in the surveys and interviews, ranked eighth and ninth (40%), respectively. The other standards were determined to have no distinct or similar rankings, which is to be expected given seven of the 15 participants noted the PSEL standards were difficult to rank and comments such as the standards were "of equal importance," "all important and hard to rank," "hard to rank the most critical," "all high priorities and hard to rank," and "similar in priority."

NPBEA (2015) notes the PSEL standards have shifted current leadership roles from managerial to more curriculum or student focused; however, the data from this study suggest the school board members still believe the role of the superintendent is more managerial in nature and hire accordingly. According to survey and interview responses participants noted potential superintendent candidates should have a finance background, be good communicators, be ethical, and have a "proven track record." These descriptions indicate school boards still maintain the thought that district leadership positions are executive in nature, this appeared to be backed up by their rankings on the PSEL standards in this study, as participants consistently rated the standard "Effective educational leaders act as agents of continuous improvement to promote each student's academic success and well-being" last. These findings indicate board members may not have made the shift to today's current educational focus of "a stronger, clearer emphasis on students and student learning," as noted in the PSEL standards (NPBEA. 2015).

Fit Matters

Another important finding from this study was that fit was important for school board members in the superintendent hiring process. The Person-Fit Theory was the guiding theory for this study. A key assumption of the theory is that characteristics of the person's personality, values, goals and attitudes must be in line with the organization's culture, values, goals and norms (Bretz & Judge, 1992; Kristof, 1996; Tom, 1971). An unexpected key finding from the data underscored this theoretical assumption—for school board members in this study, a superintendent candidate's fit with the district's needs was often cited as an important criterion for hiring, even more often than criteria based on leadership qualifications or the PSEL standards.

Clearly, according to the participants in the study, fit matters. Questions about fit were not directly asked in the research; however, the term consistently surfaced in both the survey and the interviews. For example, the board members mentioned the need for a superintendent to "fit with the needs of the district" or "fit with the vision of the board" during the hiring process more than mentioning the standards themselves. Further, when asked to rank the PSEL standards, participants ranked Standard One (which focused on "shared vision and core values") as the most important standard. Participants also discussed the importance of the idea of a "shared vision" in both their survey and interview responses, often noting it was important for superintendent candidates to "fit with the vision of the board/district." When asked in the interview process: "Is it more important to be qualified for the position or fit the needs of the district?" The three board members all indicated fit overwhelming is more important than their qualifications. One stated "they all must have the credentials to be considered, but if the board doesn't connect with the candidate it becomes a negative in the beginning." One interviewee

noted if a superintendent and board did not "fit", then it was not a good start to the superintendent-board relations. Responses such as this reiterated fit was important to the board members, and the findings were very clear in that "fit mattered" more often than qualifications. This aligns with the idea that employers match candidates on individual attributes to match the job (Arthur et al., 2006), and "fit results in positive work-related outcomes" (Bretz & Judge, 1992, p. 3).

Need for More Pre-Developed Protocols.

The findings in this study indicated the majority (63%) of the participants in this study do not have a formal set of criteria or standards in which they use consistently to hire a superintendent, even though Simpson (2010) noted boards are responsible for determining a method to hire district leaders. However, this finding—that most participants belonged to boards who did not have predeveloped protocols for hiring—does align with Wait (2013)'s research that indicated the hiring criteria used by school boards are "vague and subjective" (p. iv) or based on personal connections.

The data in this study indicated about half of participants were not aware of the PSEL standards. This is important and related to the need for hiring protocols, as the PSEL standards were developed to guide professional practice, as well as advise practitioners on hiring, supervising, and evaluations (NPBEA, 2015). Perhaps knowledge of the PSEL standards could translate into more developed hiring protocols, especially given that the one participant in this study who had used a hiring search firm (and thus had more formal hiring practices) had heard of the PSEL standards because the search firm used them.

<div align="center">

Implications

</div>

The implications of this research could both impact practicing educators, as well as school boards with hiring practices and protocols. Implications are outlined below.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this research indicate implications for practice in two areas: school board training regarding hiring practices, including pre-determined criteria and school board training in regard to the PSEL standards.

Training on the PSEL Standards. Most participants in this study were not aware of the PSEL standards, even though the Arkansas State Board of Education (2018c) adopted the PSEL standards in 2016. Since the PSEL standards are nationally recognized (NPBEA, 2015) and used by the State of Arkansas as the performance standard for educational leaders, then it is important for school board members (who may not have careers in education) to know the professional standards in the field for which they are hiring leaders. Further, the NPBEA (2015) noted the expectations for educational leaders has changed and transformed over time, yet the data from this study seemed to demonstrate school board members have not shifted their mindsets regarding what effective leadership consists of today. Therefore, more training on the PSEL standards would also allow for boards to keep abreast with current educational practices.

Training regarding hiring practices. ASBA (2018a) and Prothro (2018) have both noted hiring a superintendent is the top priority of the school board. In this study, more than half (63%) of the board members who participated stated they/the boards they belonged to had no standard criteria for hiring superintendents, and none of the three interviewees reported any training on hiring protocols. Based on the data from this study, trainings for school board members regarding hiring protocols for superintendents and

developing a formal set of criteria or standards for potential superintendent candidates is necessary. Such training may also help Arkansas school board members gain knowledge of the PSEL standards and assist them in using these standards as future criteria for hiring superintendents in Arkansas public schools.

Further, with the data indicating the majority of participants had no pre-developed protocols, the need for dialogues about the legal ramifications that could arise in the absence of protocols is needed, especially since the board is responsible for developing criteria for hiring and executing state action (ADE, 2018c). This year in Northwest Arkansas, there were at least three "quick or last minute" hires under distress due to unforeseen incidences with the superintendents in place in these districts (Kutter, 2018). Thus, the school boards for these districts met, determined the district's needs in a time of urgency, and worked to find a candidate that could move into the role of superintendent swiftly. The boards appeared to be under strenuous timelines to hire quickly yet decisively, but based on the results of this study, it is possible there were no established formal or standard protocols prior to the hiring process. The three Northwest Arkansas boards noted, hired for fit at the time of emergency, so it is possible those "quick" hires depended on the circumstance that caused the superintendent position to turn over in the first place.

Implications for Future Studies

This study provided two important implications for future research: expanding the study to other areas of Arkansas and examining Person-Fit Theory in hiring educational leaders.

Replication of the study. Future studies similar to this one should be replicated in other regions of Arkansas. There are no known previous studies that have examined how or if Arkansas school board members use educational leadership standards as a part of the hiring process. It is evident more research would be important to understand if the findings are similar across other regions of the state. This would benefit both school boards and educational leaders as to hiring practice protocols and their alignment with the professional leadership standards. Training groups, such as the Arkansas School Board Association, could then explore the data to determine if any additional needs for such trainings are necessary across the state.

Focus on Person-Fit Theory in education. Future studies with a focus on the Person-Fit Theory as it applies to this study of hiring practices in education are of interest to determine how fit can guide board hiring practices with specific leadership qualifications or characteristics. From the survey and interviews, this study revealed many boards develop criteria based on their needs at the time of the expected hire. If boards came to understand pre-determined leadership criteria could be their guide as to a qualified candidate or future superintendent, then person-organization fit would develop through relationship building during the interview process based on the needs of the district at the point of hire.

Summary

In summary, this research noted three points of discussion or consideration for boards. The finding identified Northwest Arkansas boards studied have no knowledge of the PSEL standards and how these standards might be used to assist in the hiring process of a superintendent. The findings also determined boards noted "fit matters" in the hiring

process, many times over qualifications, and developing pre-designed protocol standards would assist boards in focusing on the characteristics that are most important or fit their district. The pre-determined criteria need would alleviate the urgency to determine hiring criteria as the hiring process is developing.

The final points of this chapter were implications for practice, which includes training regarding hiring practices and training regarding the PSEL standards, and implications for future studies. As for trainings, if local boards are trained on the protocols of hiring a superintendent, including how the PSEL adopted standards might play a role in the hiring process, any legal consequences that exist may diminish. The future studies suggested are to replicate the study in other areas of Arkansas as a comparison study to assist in future hiring and training needs. Finally, the implications to examine in more detail how the person-organization fit is important for school board hiring practice should be considered.

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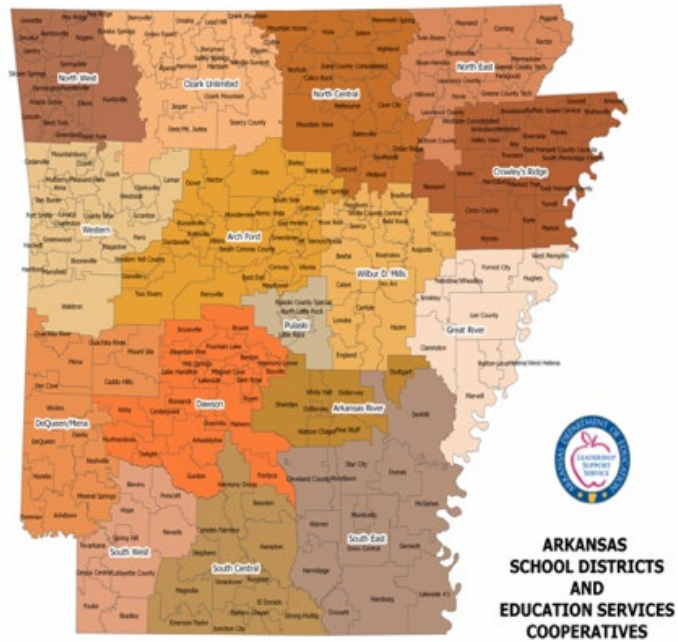
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Appendix A

ARKANSAS
SCHOOL DISTRICTS
AND
EDUCATION SERVICES
COOPERATIVES

Appendix B

Initial Participation to Survey email:

Good afternoon!

My name is Missy Hixson and I am the Assistant Director at the Northwest Arkansas Education Service Cooperative (NWAESC) in Farmington. I am also a doctoral student at Arkansas Tech working on my dissertation, which focuses on the standards used by school board members as they hire superintendent candidates.

I would like to invite you to participate in the study by completing a survey that should take no more than 30 minutes of your time to complete. The information you provide will assist me in studying the superintendent hiring practices of the Northwest Arkansas school boards. No names (of participants or school districts) are asked on the survey document. If you indicate you are willing to participate in a follow-up interview, you will be asked to provide you name and contact info (for interview purposes only). Responses to the survey (and interview, if applicable) will remain confidential.

Please feel free to contact me at my ATU email: **rhixson@atu.edu** or my cell at 479-****** should you have additional questions.
You can find the survey here **LINK.** The survey will close on **November 3, 2018 at midnight**. I hope you will complete the survey for me to understand our Northwest Arkansas school board hiring practices.

Thank you for your help and time,

<div align="center">**Appendix C**</div>

Second and Final Request to Participate in Survey:

Good morning!

This is a friendly second/final request and reminder for you to have the opportunity to complete my survey if you have not done so.

I really appreciate and thank those that have completed this survey and will be in contact in a few weeks with those that have agreed to be interviewed as a follow-up.

You can find the survey here <u>LINK.</u> The survey will close on <u>November 3, 2018 at midnight</u>

Again thanks!

Appendix D

Electronic Survey Questions (*adapted from Klamfoth, 2013)

Q1 Have you participated in the hiring of a superintendent in your term as a school board member?
- Yes
- No

*Q2 How long have you served as a member of the school board in your current district? (open ended)

Q3 How would you describe the size of the district you serve?
- Very small (less than 1,000 students)
- Small (1,001-3,000 students)
- Medium size (3,001-10,000 students)
- Large size (10,001-15,000 students)
- Very large (more than 15,000 students)

*Q4 What is the highest level of education you have completed?
- Less than high school diploma
- High school diploma or GED equivalence
- Some college, no degree
- 2 year college degree or equivalent
- 4 year college degree
- Master's degree
- Doctoral degree
- Professional degree (JD, MD)

*Q5 Gender? (open ended)

Q6 Are you of Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin?
- Yes
- No

Q7 How would you describe yourself?
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- White

Q8 What is your age range?
- 18-29
- 30-39

- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60-69
- 70+

Q9 Does your board use an outside search firm when hiring district superintendents?
- Yes {follow-up with briefly describe the search firm process used by your district in the hiring of a district superintendent}
- No {follow-up with describe briefly what process your board has previously used in the hiring of a superintendent}

Q10 What criteria or characteristics do you PERSONALLY use when hiring a superintendent? Please describe (open ended)

Q11 Does your board have a standardized set of criteria or characteristics they use when hiring a district superintendent?
- Yes
- No

Q12 What criteria or characteristics does your board use when hiring a district superintendent. Please describe. (open ended)

Q13 How do you balance your personal preferences with those of the board as a whole when making hiring decisions? Please describe. (open ended)

Q14 Are you aware or have you heard of the professional educator standards such as ISLLC or PSEL?
- Yes {follow-up with}:
  - What do you know about them?
  - Do you use them in the hiring process? How?
  - Does your board use them/refer to them in the hiring process?
- No

Q15 In your opinion, what are the three (3) most important attributes or characteristics of a superintendent you would consider when hiring? (open ended)

Q16 Please rank the following statements in order of 1-10. Select 1 for the statement you think is the most important characteristic for your district superintendent, followed by a 2 for the next most important and so on until you have ranked all 10 statements.

_____ Effective educational leaders develop, advocate, and enact a shared mission, vision, and core values of high-quality education and academic success and well-being of each student.

_____ Effective educational leaders act ethically and according to professional norms to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

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

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

_____ Effective educational leaders cultivate an inclusive, caring, and supportive school community that promotes the academic success and well-being of each student.

_____ Effective educational leaders develop the professional capacity and practice of school personnel to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

_____ Effective educational leaders foster a professional community of teachers and other professional staff to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

_____ Effective educational leaders engage families and the community in meaningful, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial ways to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

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

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

Q17 Why did you rank the characteristics above in the order that you did? Use this space to describe why your ranked …

Q18 Is there anything not asked here that you would like to add or describe concerning hiring practices of a superintendent or school board practices? (open ended)

Sample email request to interview

Mr./Mrs. ********
You indicated on my dissertation survey that you would be willing to allow me to interview you about School Board Hiring Practices and the Educational Leadership Standards.

I would like to set up an interview time of about 1 hour at your convenience and location within the next few weeks. The location could be here at Northwest Arkansas Cooperative in Farmington if you choose. We have rooms available and it is a quiet spot to be interviewed, as well as recorded.

Please choose 3-5 dates you would be available and indicate the time as well.
Feel free to call me if needed to arrange the time and date.

I look forward to hearing back from you and I appreciate your time.

Appendix F

Interview questions: Three of the board members in the categories of a smaller rural district, a larger urban district, and a district that uses or has used an external search firm will be interviewed face-to-face.

Q1 How many superintendents hiring process have you been involved with in your district?

Q2 Tell me about any training you have had on the superintendent hiring process.

Q3 What are your board's expectations for a superintendent? How does the board determine those expectations?

Q4 What do you personally see as the most important characteristic a superintendent must possess in a leadership role? Why?

Q5 Describe the way your district has hired a superintendent in the past? Was it successful? (why or why not, and what makes you say that?) What would you consider changing if given that opportunity?

Q6 Tell me about the criteria your board uses to hire a superintendent, if any? How do you determine / discuss that criteria? Do you just ask general interview questions or do you have a standardized list of priorities or leadership qualities your district considers? Do you discuss the criteria in advance of a hiring?

Q7 Are you familiar with the ISLLC and/or PSEL Standards? Describe briefly. How do these and/or don't these come into consideration during the hiring process?

Q8 Does your district use stakeholder groups for the hiring process or for interviews, such as other administrators, teachers, community, parents? If yes, describe how the process is done. If no, describe your process.

Q9 Would your board consider an external search firm for assistance in hiring a superintendent? Why or why not?

Q10 **Search firm only**: Explain how your experience with search firms in the hiring process went and describe a little about that process.

Q11 **Search firm only:** Why did your district choose to use a search firm for the hiring process? How many times has your district used a search firm?

Q12 Is there anything not asked here that you would like to add or describe concerning hiring practices of a superintendent or school board practices?

Appendix G

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval letter

ARKANSAS TECH UNIVERSITY

Office of Sponsored Programs and University Initiatives
Administration Building, Room 207
1509 North Boulder Avenue
Russellville, Arkansas 72801

Office: 479-880-4327
www.atu.edu

October 19, 2018

To Whom It May Concern:

The Arkansas Tech University Institutional Review Board has approved Robin "Missy" Hixson's IRB application, "Aligning Criteria: School Board Hiring Practices and the Educational Leadership Standard," through October 15, 2021. The approval code is Hixson_101518.

Thank you,

Masanori Kuroki, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chair