Impact Radius: A Phenomenological Study of the Principal Experience During Superintendent Turnover

Matthew Boucher
Impact Radius: A Phenomenological Study of the Principal Experience During Superintendent Turnover

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

By
Matthew Boucher

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

2021
Impact Radius: A Phenomenological Study of the Principal Experience During Superintendent Turnover

We certify that we have read this dissertation and approved it as adequate in scope and quality. We have found that it is complete and satisfactory in all respects, and that any and all revisions required by the final examining committee have been made.

Dissertation Committee

Aura Wharton-Bec, EdD, Committee Chair

Sarah J. Noonan, EdD, Committee Member

Kate Maguire

Kate Maguire, EdD, Committee Member

May 7, 2021
Final Approval Date
ABSTRACT

This phenomenological inquiry explored how principals and district administrators in small, single high school, school districts experienced the phenomenon of superintendent turnover, while examining the perceived effects of superintendent change on these leaders as they navigated the organizational turbulence created by change in the superintendency. Superintendent movement trends toward larger, and more urban and suburban districts (Alsbury, 2004; Grissom & Mitani, 2016; Kamrath, 2014), the probability of principals in small school districts experiencing superintendent turnover is significant. According to Fullan (2000), turnover in the superintendency can result in significant changes to the mission and vision of a school district, that may be felt for years. However, while the research predicts higher rates of superintendent change in smaller school districts, the literature is almost silent on the impact of superintendent turnover on the next layer of leadership in school districts. Ten principals and two district administrators representing six Midwestern school districts (four rural and two suburban) participated in this study.

This phenomenological inquiry produced five key findings indicating that principals and district leaders experience a variety of mixed emotions throughout their interaction with the phenomenon of superintendent turnover and the level of collective trust within a district significantly impacts or intensifies the emotions and interactions these leaders experience during this organizational transition. This study produced six implications leading to the following five recommendations to current and aspiring superintendents and school board members to consider prior to and throughout their experience with superintendent turnover: embrace multiplicity, foster collective trust, develop a transition plan for principals, create transparency in process and communication, and know the new superintendent cheat code.
Keywords: Superintendent turnover, leadership transitions, collective trust, school district administration.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank the three people who made this scholarly journey possible through their constant support, encouragement, inspiration, and sacrifices: my wife Alisa, son Zachary, and daughter Thea. Thank you for remaining curious and supportive in spite of the profound loss of family time during this journey. You each make me want to be a better person, partner, father, educator, and scholar. I hope to be as much of an inspiration and source of energy for you, as you have been for me!

I would like to thank the following cast of characters who have played starring roles in the melodrama that has been my journey from the classroom to the principal’s office and back to the classroom.

Act 1: My journey to a career education started in Mr. Levine’s 11th grade United States History class, where unbeknownst to him, he set me on the path to becoming a teacher with his passion and storytelling. The specific moment of ignition for me came during an impromptu soliloquy by Mr. Levine on the virtues of a career in education that resonated deeply with me at a time when I had not yet committed to the habits of mind that contributed to academic success. Mr. Levine provided a spark that became the pilot light for a career in the human development industry.

Act 2: I spent the first 10 years in education as a Social Studies teacher and loved it. In fact, I had no ambition to leave the classroom, until my close friend and colleague Ron Wagner gently nudged me toward pursing an Education Specialist degree and administrative license. At the same time, Principal Larry Lucio was working tirelessly to nurture leadership out of a passionate and sometimes brash mid-career teacher. I would not have transitioned to an administrative role if not for the influence, support, and encouragement both of these colleagues
provided. Their ongoing mentorship and friendship continue to contribute to my development as an educator and leader.

Act 3: I had the honor and pleasure to be a member of the University of St. Thomas Doctoral Cohort 29. I appreciate all the riveting and challenging conversations and social learning we shared as classmates and aspiring scholars. Specifically, I want to thank Heidi Anderson-Isaacson and Brad Canham for your collaboration and inspiration during our doctoral cohort journey. You both buoyed me at critical points in the journey, in ways you may have been unaware of, and I sincerely appreciate you both as learners, leaders, and friends.

Denouement: I want to close with appreciation for and recognition of the thoughtful and timely contributions my dissertation committee members have made to this journey and study. Dr. Sarah Noonan became a cast member in this production during act two, while I was pursuing an Education Specialist degree and administrative license and has had an ongoing impact on my development as a learner, leader, and scholar. Dr. Noonan, you are a dissertation and publication savant and I appreciate your wisdom and insights throughout my journey as an administrator, student, and scholar. Dr. Kate McGuire, thank you for joining the committee and for challenging me to write with a more culturally aware and responsive lens, while helping me to see some of my linguistic blind spots during this process. Your experience and insights certainly enhanced this study. Finally, Dr. Aura Wharton-Beck, I want to thank you for your patient and persistent support and guidance throughout the journey. I appreciate your influence and impact while nurturing this study from an idea to an inquiry to a completed dissertation. You have been so much more than a committee chair, and I deeply appreciate you!
TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problem Statement, Purpose, and Significance</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflexive Statement</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Factors Influencing Superintendent Turnover</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Impact of Size</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Perceived Reality</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement from Rural to Suburban and Urban Superintendencies</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor Market Forces and Push-Pull Factors</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on the System</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency Matters</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust and Leadership: Trust Matters</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytical Theory</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative Research</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phenomenology</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Hermeneutical and Transcendental Phenomenological Traditions</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phenomenology and the Principals’ Experience</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Review Board</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of the Researcher</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A Theoretical Nexus ........................................................................................................ 143

Collective Trust and Trust/Distrust Subgroups ............................................................. 146

Collective Trust Subgroups and the Four-Frames .......................................................... 148

Interpretation Through the Four-Frames and Collective Trust Models ......................... 151

Chapter Summary ......................................................................................................... 163

CHAPTER SIX: SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS ............ 168

Implications ....................................................................................................................... 168

Implication A – Administrators are a Primary Information Access Point ................. 170

Implication B – Transparency Promotes Trust ............................................................... 170

Implication C – Collaboration and Trust Promotes Growth ....................................... 171

Implication D – Establishing Collective Trust is the Job ............................................. 172

Implication E – Multiplicity Matters ............................................................................. 173

Implication F – Collective Trust Diminishes Transition Anxiety ............................... 174

Recommendations ........................................................................................................... 175

Understand and Embrace Multiplicity ....................................................................... 175

Purposefully Foster Collective Trust ............................................................................. 176

Develop and Communicate a Transition Plan for Administrators ............................. 177

Transparency in the Search and Selection Process and Communications .................. 178

Know the New Superintendent Cheat Code ................................................................. 179

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research .......................................... 180

REFERENCES ................................................................................................................. 184

APPENDICES .................................................................................................................... 190

Appendix A: Invitation to Participants ......................................................................... 191
Appendix B: Informed Consent Form ................................................................. 192
Appendix C: Prospective Follow-up Interview Questions ................................. 194
Appendix D: CITI Certifications ...................................................................... 195
Appendix E: Summary of Responses to Structured Questioning Approach ........ 197
Appendix F: Reported Stakeholder Sentiment by Phase of Superintendent Transition .... 206
Appendix G: Overview of Sub-Findings by Phase of Superintendent Transition .......... 208
Appendix H: Participant Frequency by Stakeholder Group and Phase of ............. 209
Appendix I: Overview of Frequency of dialogue by Phase of Superintendent Transition .... 210
Appendix J: Participant Frequency of Dialogue Comparing Reported Trust and Distrust .... 212
Appendix K: Frequency of Dialogue: Trust/Distrust Trend Sum and Participant Averages . 213
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Overview of the Four-Frames Model ................................................................. 35
Table 2. Reframing Organizational Change .................................................................. 37
Table 3. Overview of Participants ............................................................................... 70
Table 4. Trust/Distrust Subgroups .............................................................................. 80
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. A Framework for Understanding Superintendent Turnover .............................................. 18

Figure 2. The Three Phases of Transition ...................................................................................... 27

Figure 3. A Model of Collective Trust Formation and its Consequences ........................................ 43
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

My study explored how principals and district leaders in small, single high school, school districts experience change or turnover in the superintendent position. I intended to explore superintendent and principal relationships during periods of transition, including departure of the residing superintendent and installation of the successor. I also planned to examine the perceived effects of superintendent change on principals as they navigate the potential turbulence caused by superintendent change in small school districts. I utilized qualitative research methodology, while incorporating phenomenological methods in order to understand how the phenomenon of superintendent turnover is experienced by the next layer of leadership in a small school district.

The Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration defined “Potential Impact Radius” as “the radius of a circle within which the potential failure of a pipeline could have significant impact on people or property” (Baker, 2005). Subsequently, Tom Sommer (2017), the Director of Engineering at Redbubble, an online marketplace for art, and frequent contributor on Medium.com, an online magazine, introduced the impact radius model. Sommer (2017b) asserted the impact radius model “is based on the idea of an ever-increasing circle around yourself representing the impact you are having day-to-day” (para. 8). He further explained impact radius:

When talking about impact, I like to think about it in terms of a circle around yourself at the centre. With a very small circle—most likely early on in your career—you impact is confined to yourself. Over time you will be able to influence more and more. Essentially, you increase the radius of impact around you. (Sommer, 2017a, para. 4)
In this study, I used impact radius to describe the sphere of influence a superintendent has in a small, single high school, school district on district and school administrators and the resulting impact turnover in the superintendency has on these school leaders and their leadership actions.

In large school districts, there are often several layers of separation between the superintendent and building principals, as a result of the size of the school district and the scale of the bureaucracy. For the purpose of this study, large school districts referred to school districts with more than one high school or total student population greater than 8750 pupils. According to data available on the Minnesota Department of Education website’s Data Center, during the 2018-19 school year, there were 21 school districts that fit this description, and they range in total student population from 8,780 – 38,764 students. As a result of the size of these organizations and the coordination of services and supports offered across a greater number of school sites, there tends to be a higher number of district-level administrators and coordinators in these school districts.

However, in small, single high school, school districts, building principals are often active members of the district leadership team and serve as district-level coordinators for services like testing or special programming resulting in the establishment of a professionally intimate relationship with their superintendent. Considering the average tenure for superintendents in the state of Minnesota is 5.75 years, the likelihood of principals in small school districts experiencing a change in the superintendent position is significant (Gundlach, 2016). I sought to explore how principals in small, single high school, school districts experience turnover in the top leadership position in their school district.

My interest in this inquiry stems from my experience and aspirations as a public school educator and administrator. I invested the first 13 years of my educational career as a teacher,
building leader, and administrator in a large urban school district, before transitioning to a small suburban school district. After transitioning out of the large urban school district I started my career, I spent the past 13 years of my career as building principal in two small suburban school districts. I continued to see how the economies of scale influence differences in the climate, culture, and organizational and professional infrastructures between large and small school districts. Moreover, I observed how shifts in district vision dramatically impacted educators’ focus and practices in smaller districts. While I understand many factors may influence this, my experience in small school districts continues to reveal the subtle but seismic impact district size has on organizational practices and culture.

I recently transitioned to a new principal position and I continue to uncover examples of how a change in leadership, at the building level, influences daily interactions and change inertia in a professionally intimate environment. This professional transition reminded me that developing trust is a slow and arduous process. I genuinely focused on operating in a trustworthy manner, while being an active and patient listener. However, I observed that the interpretation of my actions and words, at times, were influenced more by my new colleagues’ relationship and history with my predecessors than by the precision or purposefulness of my communications or conduct. As a result, developing trust with teachers and building leaders continues to be a rigorous task, requiring me to be patient and allow others to move through their determinations of my trustworthiness. I am curious if there are commonalities between this experience and the impact of superintendent turnover on building and district administrators.

Charged with building cohesion and inertia around the district mission and vision, principals often function as middle management while supporting the implementation of district level initiatives. I hope to better understand how administrators who are charged with leading
change in schools experience turnover in the top district leadership position, and how this may influence their own leadership, actions, and focus.

**Problem Statement, Purpose, and Significance**

In *The Study of the American School Superintendency 2000*, sponsored by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), Glass et al. (2000) reviewed data on 2,232 superintendents and established the national average superintendent tenure was between five and six years. Considering the average tenure for superintendents, Alsbury (2008) contended that the loss of a superintendent can negatively impact district staff morale and performance. According to Fullan (2000), turnover in the superintendency can result in significant changes to the mission and vision of a school district, impact the direction, and direct the professional expectations and practices of a school district that may be felt for years. Principals and district administrators are the leaders in a school district most responsible and accountable for creating traction around the district vision and mission. Additionally, they are tasked with implementing district initiatives that support the values and goals of the organization. However, the literature is almost silent on the impact of turnover in the superintendent position on the next layer of leadership in school districts.

Meanwhile, studies established superintendents tend to move toward more populous and more prestigious school districts, especially when there is a salary increase associated with the move (Byrd et al., 2006; Grissom & Anderson, 2012; Kamrath, 2007). Additionally, several studies observed that superintendent movement trends toward larger, and more urban and suburban districts (Alsbury, 2004; Grissom & Mitani, 2016; Kamrath, 2014). This phenomenological study explored how building administrators and district leaders, in small
school districts, experience superintendent turnover, and sought to understand how a new leader can navigate this change.

**Reflexive Statement**

Patton (2015) asserted, “Self-awareness, even a certain degree of self-analysis, has become a requirement of qualitative inquiry” (p. 605). Throughout this study, I focused on being highly reflective and aware of my own experiential biases and beliefs. These biases and beliefs have been conditioned by my experiences and background as a white male educator, who grew up in a low-income, urban household, but only understands these experiences through the privileged lens of a Caucasian man. In addition, while the three school districts I have worked in have had distinctly different organizational cultures and practices, my professional experience has been confined to just these three districts. These experiences influence and serve as the foundation of my professional values and paradigm. Therefore, I had to be attentive to my own conceptual understandings of ideas like organization functionality or dysfunction and guarded against imposing those conceptualizations on the experiences of others. In this study, I interviewed peers from several other school districts, and while there were similarities in size and organizational structures between their school districts and those I have experienced, I had to be sure I was not assuming an understanding of their experience based on my own. Patton (2015) addressed the importance of reflexivity in research, offering “reflexivity reminds the qualitative inquirer to be attentive to and conscious of the cultural, political, social, linguistic, and economic origins of one’s own perspective” (p. 604).
Research Question

The research question that guided this study was: How do principals in single high school, school districts, with enrollments less than 8750 students, experience the phenomenon of superintendent turnover, and how are they impacted by this change? In exploring this question, my goal was to examine the perceived effects of superintendent change on principals, in small school districts as they navigate the potential turbulence caused by change in the superintendency.
**Definition of Terms**

I adopted the following terms and definitions to conduct this study:

**Announcement Phase (of superintendent transition):** the phase of superintendent transition beginning with the school board announcement of superintendent separation (retirement, resignation, non-renewal, termination) and concluding with the initiation of the formal search and selection process.

**Appointment Phase (of superintendent transition):** the phase of superintendent transition beginning when the school board announces the hiring or appointment of the next superintendent and concluding when the new district leader is formally installed in the role of superintendent on the first contractual day of their employment, generally on the first of July in the year of hire.

**Collective Trust:** “Formally, we define collective trust as a stable group property rooted in the shared perceptions and affect about the trustworthiness of another group or individual that emerges over time out of multiple social exchanges within the group. These socially constructed shared trust beliefs define the group’s willingness to be vulnerable to another group or individual” (Forsyth et al., 2011, p. 22).

**District Leader:** Educational leaders, coordinators, and administrators who are not assigned to work directly on a building administrative team but are entrusted with coordinating and supporting the implementation of initiatives throughout the school district.

**Economies of Scale:** economies of scale refer to the increased size and layers of bureaucracy that exist in larger school districts, as a result of the need to coordinate and support continuity of programing and practice across a higher number of school sites.

**Installation Phase (of superintendent transition):** For the purpose of this study, I defined this phase of superintendent transition as beginning when the new district leader is formally installed
in the role of superintendent, on the first contractual day of their employment, and extends through their first year in the position.

**Large School Districts:** large school districts referred to school districts with more than one high school or total student population greater than 8750 pupils.

**Network Density:** “the total number of ties. Density refers to the proportion of existing to potential ties in a network” (Daly, 2015, p. 5).

**Phases of Superintendent Transition:** For the purpose of this study, I defined the following four phases of superintendent transition in order to study the phenomenon of superintendent turnover: Phase 1: Announcement of change (retirement, resignation, non-continuation); Phase 2: Search process; Phase 3: Appointment of new hire; Phase 4: Installation of new superintendent (this phase spans from the official start date for the new hire through the first year of their superintendency—if the respondent had experienced superintendent turnover the school year prior to their interview).

**Search Phase (of superintendent transition):** For the purpose of this study, I defined this phase of superintendent transition as beginning with the initiation of the formal search and selection process and concluding when the school board announces the hiring or appointment of the next superintendent.

**Small School Districts:** small school districts referred to school districts with a single high school and total student population below 8750 pupils.

**Superintendent Turnover:** Change in the person serving as the superintendent of a school district, which may be a result of voluntary or involuntary movement out of the position.

**Superintendent Tenure:** The length of service for a superintendent with a school district, which is determined by the school board through a negotiated contact(s) with the superintendent.
**Trust:** “A state in which individuals and groups are willing to make themselves vulnerable to others and take risks with confidence that others will respond to their actions in positive ways, that is, with benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness” (Forsyth et al., 2011, pp. 19–20).
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Several factors influenced turnover in the superintendent position in school districts, such as salary, student performance, and school board relations (Grissom & Mitani, 2016; Kamrath, 2007; Natale, 2010; Robinson, 2013; Tekniepe, 2015). However, little research exists on how changes in the superintendency are experienced by school principals and district leaders in small school districts. I examined the perceived effects of superintendent change on principals in small school districts, as they navigated the potential turbulence caused by changes in the superintendency. I adopted the following research question: How do principals in single high school, school districts, with enrollments less than 8750 students, experience the phenomenon of superintendent turnover and how are they impacted by this change? Principals and district-level program directors share the responsibility of building cohesion and collective effort around a school district’s mission and vision. In small school districts these leaders often work closely with the superintendent, establishing professionally intimate relationships, potentially creating greater vulnerability, or intensifying the impact experienced when there is change in the superintendency.

My exploration of scholarly literature began with searching the following key term: superintendent turnover causes and effects. I used the following search databases: ERIC, Academic Search Premier, Scopus, and Google Scholar. This search expanded to include terms such as: superintendent or district leaders, retention, attrition, turnover, quit, leave, stay. The search of scholarly literature extended to the impact of turnover on the organization, system, principals, and schools. Finally, I focused on finding literature that considered the impact of trust in educational systems. When faced with limited results, I reviewed the reference lists from literature which most aligned with my question.
After reviewing over 80 scholarly resources, I organized my review of the literature in the following three categories: (1) factors influencing superintendent turnover; (2) impact of superintendent turnover on the system; and (3) trust and leadership between principals and superintendents. I reviewed Bridges’ (2016) “Bridges Transition Model,” Bolman and Deal’s (2017) “Four-Frame Model,” and Forsyth et al.’s (2011) Collective Trust Model as tools for interpreting the findings and making meaning of this study. The journey toward understanding how principals in small, single high school, school districts experienced turnover in the superintendent position began with an exploration of the factors contributing to change in the superintendency.

**Factors Influencing Superintendent Turnover**

Each school district in my midwestern state functions as an independent political entity, led by a superintendent and governed by a school board. Although superintendents serve as the chief administrator in a school district and while they are often well compensated for doing so, they must learn to live with limited job security. According to Glass et al. (2000), the average tenure for superintendents, nationwide, is five to six years. While superintendents occupy a prestigious position, the complex work of meeting and mediating the diverse, and sometimes divergent, needs of a school community can be costly.

Grissom and Mitani (2016), in a longitudinal study reviewing 15 years of administrative data files of the Missouri Department of Education, observed that “superintendent salary is an important (negative) predictor of turnover. In fact, the coefficient suggests that a $10,000 annual salary increase reduces the marginal probability of turning over by approximately three percentage points” (p. 369). Moreover, the researchers uncovered three identifiable patterns in the data: a) “superintendents appear to sort toward more advantaged student populations,” b)
“superintendents systematically move to larger districts in more urban contexts” (pg. 379), and finally, c) they observed a typical salary increase of $10,000 associated with superintendent moves.

Previously, Grissom and Anderson (2012), in a study of 100 California school districts, found superintendent moves resulted in a median salary increase of $21,000. Additionally, they determined that superintendents tend to move toward larger school districts with the median increase in student populations of approximately 2,300 over their previous school districts. However, Grissom and Anderson asserted there was no evidence in this study of superintendents sorting toward school districts with fewer disadvantaged students in this study, based on observed median differences that suggest superintendents moved toward districts with more African American and Hispanic students. Meanwhile, Grissom, and Mitani (2016) observed district academic performance could be predictive relative to superintendent turnover, but it was not linear across all performance bands. These researchers observed that superintendents in both very high achieving and very low achieving school districts were more stable and those districts were less likely to lose their superintendents.

Byrd et al. (2006) surveyed 142 Texas superintendents and established that superintendents reported increased politics and their relationship with the school board, specifically the board president, as significant factors influencing superintendent tenure. In this study, 55% of tenured superintendents, along with 76% of the superintendents changing districts during this study ranked increased politics in the profession as the top one or two influences of instability in the profession (Byrd et al., 2006). Byrd et al. also noticed that the relationship between the superintendent and the school board president has a statistically significant impact on the length of a superintendent’s tenure. Vasquez (2017), while exploring the impact of
frequent superintendent turnover on the culture of a suburban school district, in a northeastern state, discovered that the majority of the staff she interviewed, regardless of position, felt internal and external politics had a significant impact on the frequent superintendent turnover their district had experienced.

The Impact of Size

Alsbury (2004) surveyed 176 superintendents across Washington State and determined there was a generalizable pattern relative to politically motivated superintendent turnover. This study revealed a trend that with increased school district enrollment size, comes greater political turmoil and threats to the superintendent’s tenure. However, Alsbury (2004) found that “it appears that the smallest districts with the least school board turnover and the lowest amount of voter dissatisfaction experience the highest turnover of superintendents” (p. 370). In addition, Alsbury (2004) revealed that the school districts with 5,000-9,999 students had the least amount of superintendent turnover, despite having the second highest rate of politically motivated school board turnover, suggesting that school district size may have an inconsistent impact on superintendent turnover. While Alsbury did not assert it, this study potentially introduces a question about optimal district size as it relates to superintendent retention.

Grissom and Anderson (2012) explored the connection between district size and turnover rate, as it pertains to the largest school districts in California and offered there was not a statistically significant difference in the three-year superintendent turnover rate for school districts by size, except for the largest school districts with more than 29,000 students. They found, “Through the first nine deciles, the average 3-year turnover rate is 43%. For the largest 10% of districts, however, this rate is 71%” (Grissom & Anderson, 2012, p. 1163). While Alsbury (2004) observed that politically motivated schoolboard member turnover increases as
the size of the school district increases and asserted this may have an impact on the stability of the superintendency, the Grissom and Anderson (2012) study showed that to be true only for the largest school districts in California.

**The Perceived Reality**

Kamrath (2007) sought to understand, from the shareholder perspectives, what led to high rates of superintendent turnover in their small rural school districts. In this multi-case study, he noted community members “listed school financial problems as the characteristic most contributing to superintendent turnover. However, school board members, staff members, and superintendents generally perceived school board relations and politics as most contributing to superintendent stress levels” (p. 270). These three participant groups also ranked problems with their school boards as “the most likely characteristics contributing to superintendent turnover in their districts” (p. 270).

Kamrath (2007) reported superintendents, in particular, expressed concerns of board members not understanding their roles and responsibilities, board members being micromanagers, and the impact of frequent board turnover. Relatedly, Sheehan (2013) interviewed 200 Massachusetts superintendents, to learn what factors led them to leave their superintendent positions. He classified the reasons given for leaving the superintendency into three categories: the demanding nature of the job, an aging superintendent population, and relations with school board members. Both studies (Kamrath, 2007; Sheehan, 2013) recognized the superintendent’s relationship with the school board and the board chair as a significant contributing factor to superintendent job satisfaction and tenure.

Similarly, in surveying superintendents across the state of New York, Natale (2010) noticed newer superintendents, with fewer than five years in the position, felt frequent school
board change significantly impacted their ability to lead the district and increased incidents of micromanagement. Furthermore, Natale reported the respondents with 6-10 years in their position expressed having more difficulty with frequent board changes than their more or less experienced peers. Natale (2010) suggested further research may be warranted to explore if this stage in superintendent’s careers aligns with the time in superintendents are most likely to seek other opportunities. Meanwhile, Robinson (2013) interviewed 20 women superintendents from Virginia who left a superintendency and discerned that the women in her study left the position for many of the same reasons other outgoing superintendents report, such as: leaving for another superintendency, changes in the school board and/or micromanaging by the school board members, challenges found within the community, and/or personal and family considerations involving retirement and health. The women superintendents in Robinson’s study often expressed there was rarely just one reason why they would leave a position. Robinson categorized the reasons these women superintendents left a position into the following four themes: “it’s not the job I thought it would be; struggles with family; take care of herself; and I’m not the right fit for the community” (p. 160).

Several studies (Alsbury, 2004; Byrd et al., 2006; Grissom & Anderson, 2012; Tekniepe, 2015) recognized superintendents often cite board relations, specifically their relationship with the school board chair, as a top reason for leaving their post. Politically motivated changes in the superintendency, whether voluntary or involuntary, may create a leadership vacuum, casting district and building staff into greater uncertainty about the direction and vision for the school district. For example, respondents in Vasquez’s (2017) study “characterized the culture as being frozen, never moving ahead, having no stability, no vision and dodging and weaving the cultural impacts of frequent superintendent turnover” (p. 80).
Movement from Rural to Suburban and Urban Superintendencies

Much of the research on superintendent mobility (Byrd, 2006; Grissom, 2012, 2016; Kamrath, 2007, 2014) revealed superintendents often move from small and rural settings toward larger and more urban or suburban school districts, possibly in pursuit of increased pay and prestige.

[T]he discrepancy in pay between rural and non-rural superintendents is clearly shown. The ERS (2006) stated that urban superintendents had a mean salary of over $172,000 in 2005/06, while rural superintendents averaged about $91,500. The ERS (2006) also stated that large district superintendents averaged $185,000, while superintendents in the smallest districts barely eclipsed $103,000. (Kamrath, 2007, p. 283)

Kamrath (2014) asserted there are both advantages and disadvantages for working as a superintendent in small, rural school districts. This includes the ability to have high levels of community engagement and contributions to student achievement due to the benefit of living and working in small, rural communities where schooling serves as the central focus of community life.

Similarly, a 2011 study prepared by the Institute of Educational Sciences (IES) and contracted through the Regional Educational Laboratory Appalachia, seemingly supported Kamrath’s (2014) contentions. This inquiry found no statistical difference in the turnover rate in the state of Kentucky when comparing the following school district classifications and characteristics: rural versus non-rural, Appalachian versus non-Appalachian (IES, 2011).

Additionally, while statewide superintendent turnover varied by district demographics and fiscal and achievement characteristics, the patterns were not statistically significant enough to suggest a connection between these characteristics and superintendent turnover in the state of Kentucky.
between 1998-2008. The findings of this study, however, were inconsistent with the patterns established by other researchers (Byrd, 2006; Grissom, 2012, 2016; Kamrath, 2007, 2014).

**Labor Market Forces and Push-Pull Factors**

Alsbury (2004) argued that superintendent turnover may be more related to district size and professional opportunity, than an indicator of community dissatisfaction. While finding that superintendents in school districts with 5000-9999 students had the lowest turnover, but the second highest rate of politically motivated school board turnover, he posited this suggests other difficult to measure variables may be at work. Grissom and Anderson (2012) presented the theory that labor market forces are the true influencer of superintendent movement and asserted that we can better understand this phenomenon if we view it as an outcome in the labor market for superintendents.

Byrd et al. (2006) discovered 62% of the respondent mobile superintendents in their study reported leaving for better opportunities elsewhere. Further, supporting Grissom and Anderson’s (2012) theory that labor market forces are a greater influencer of superintendent movement than community or political dissatisfaction. Grissom and Anderson contended while superintendent movement trends toward larger districts and higher paying positions, they asserted each move is actually a result of a two-sided cost-benefit analysis done by both the superintendent and the school board, as they consider their current circumstances and the factors of labor supply and demand. Figure 1 (from Grissom & Anderson, 2010, as cited in Vasquez, 2017, p. 12) conceptualizes superintendent turnover as a product of the labor market for superintendents.
Tekniepe (2015) further developed the idea of superintendent movement as a product of labor market forces, while applying the push-pull career movement theory to the turnover of rural superintendents. In his 2015 study, which surveyed rural superintendents from 48 states, Tekniepe provided the following explanation of push and pull factors that influence rural superintendents:

Push factors that affect rural superintendents can include conflict with the school board, pressures that originate from inside the organization, pressures from within the community, or simply negative perceptions of the superintendent’s ability to adequately
manage the fiscal affairs of the district. Pull factors, in contrast, are those typically facilitating his or her opportunity for professional, financial, or personal advancement to another jurisdiction. (p. 2)

Tekniepe contended factors influencing push-induced involuntary superintendent turnovers can generally be grouped into four broad domains: “political conflict, internal pressures, external (community) pressures, and fiscal stress” (p. 2).

Similarly, Tekniepe and Stream (2012) applied the push-pull career movement theory to other chief administrative positions and found research on government administrator turnover distills the causal factors into two primary categories: push factors and pull factors. They reported push-induced factors generally consist of those forces, influences, or tensions that lead an elected board to terminate or seek the resignation of a county administrator. While pull-induced factors are those forces or influences that lead to an administrator leaving for career advancement opportunities.

Interestingly, Tekniepe (2015) asserted strong superintendent employment contracts were shown to reduce the likelihood of involuntary turnover, while weak superintendent contracts increase the probability of push-induced change in the superintendency. Tekniepe, therefore, offered a mechanism available to superintendents that may diminish the likelihood of involuntary turnover: the negotiation of multi-year contracts that provide some protections from politically motivated terminations. Regardless of whether a superintendent is pushed or pulled from their position, a turnover in the superintendency inevitably impacts the school system.

**Impact on the System**

Superintendents occupy the highest administrative position in a school district and are charged with developing a vision for the district, then building cohesion in the system around
their vision, with the ultimate aim of improving student performance. While there is limited research on the impact of superintendent turnover, some have tried to assess how schools, districts, and their stakeholders are affected by change at the top in a school district. For instance, Marzano and Waters (2006) found a positive correlation between superintendent tenure and implementation of leadership practices with student achievement. Other researchers noticed that effective operation of key managerial functions, such as leadership of instruction, strategic planning, financial management, and staff recruitment, contribute to a positive learning and professional climate in school districts, which has a positive, indirect impact on staff morale and student achievement (Alsbury, 2008; Byrd et al., 2006; Petersen, 2002). Alsbury (2008) posited that when the conditions mentioned above exist, the loss of a superintendent can create professional uncertainty which can impact staff morale, causing a “trickle-down” effect on principal and teacher turnover and performance. Additionally, Hill (2005), as cited in Vasquez (2017), observed that superintendent turnover had a negative effect on student achievement, at least in the short term.

Kamrath and Brunner (2014) concluded “that longer tenure in the superintendency (at least 5-6 years) appears to make a difference for schools and their communities.” (p. 435). Kamrath and Brunner conducted a qualitative multi-case study in which they interviewed community members from four different Midwestern small rural school districts to explore the perceived impact of frequent superintendent turnover within those communities. Community members in these districts consistently reported frequent superintendent turnover as problematic for the schools and negative for the community. Respondents overwhelming wanted stability in the position of superintendent and the average desired tenure was reported to be between 7-10 years.
Frequency Matters

Vasquez (2017) discovered, in her case study analysis of a suburban school district, that frequent and sustained churn at the superintendent position, not surprisingly, had a negative influence on the culture of a district.

Staff at all levels of the organization expressed dissatisfaction with the frequency of superintendent turnover. They expressed concern regarding its influences on the district culture, as the perceptions of staff indicated the growth of the district was stymied, its vision was compromised, and outside influences had too far a reach into district operations, which resulted in a conflict-ridden “unstable” district with low staff morale and where the superintendent is viewed as nothing more than “temporary help.” (p124) Finnigan and Daly (2017) contended, “change at the top can change life in the classroom, and constant change can make teachers want to hunker down and wait things out” (p.25). Vasquez (2017) asserted that when there is frequent superintendent turnover, a new cultural norm of waiting out the new superintendent develops. She found frequent change in the district leadership caused staff to band together and resist improvement initiatives. Teachers in this study, when faced with persistent superintendent turnover, were more likely to “stick close to those they have relationships with, which influences the culture of the district by not encouraging collaboration or trust” (Vasquez, 2017, p. 91).

Similarly, Natkin (2002) argued that in districts with frequent superintendent turnover, the superintendents often lead from a place of self-preservation and avoid taking on major reform efforts. As a result, district staff in these circumstances tend to take a “wait-and-see” approach to the new superintendent’s initiatives, mission, and vision. Moreover, Alsbury (2008) offered that superintendent turnover can elicit uneasiness, angst, trepidation, and uncertainty among staff,
negatively impacting their morale and stakeholder perceptions of the school district. Vasquez’s (2017) findings echoed this, pointing out: “interview participants described frustration, confusion, constantly changing leadership styles and a lack of stability and district vision that has had a negative influence on the district culture over time” (p. 80). Representatives from each of the staff groups interviewed expressed their dissatisfaction with the frequent superintendent turnover the district had experienced and the impact it had on district culture. In summary, superintendent turnover, especially when the position turns over frequently, can dramatically impact a school district’s functionality, results, and culture, while influencing the relationships and trust between staff (Alsbury, 2008; Finnigan & Daly, 2017; Natkin, 2002; Vasquez, 2017).

**Trust and Leadership: Trust Matters**

A theme emerging in the literature is that in schools and districts with strong webs of social relationships, where risk taking and trust are emphasized, educators and leaders are better positioned to improve outcomes (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Mintrop & Trujillo, 2007). Aguallard and Goughnour (2006) suggested districts with shared theories of action and clear communication, interaction, and relationships around improvement efforts see greater systemic coherence and goal achievement. Trusting ties between leaders in an organization are key to a reform effort because they enable the transfer of routines and complex knowledge while encouraging collective problem-solving and systemic solutions (Reagans & McEvily, 2003). Spilline et al. (2006) argued the structure and quality of social ties among individuals, represented in levels of trust in an organization, may be what defines the shape, diffusion, and success of any change strategy.

The work of Daly and Finnigan (2012) built on existing research and emphasized the importance of trust as a critical precondition for establishing reciprocal relations and networks in
school districts that promote systemic learning and improvements for urban leaders and learners. Daly and Finnegan expressed the symbiosis of trust and change potential: “We must also focus on the trust between leaders, which seems to form the foundation upon which improvement and change can occur. One without the other limits the potential of systems to move forward and improve” (p. 522). Similarly, Fukuyama (1995) asserted high-trust environments enable systems to be more innovative and diminish transactional costs and relationships in organizations, allowing them to stay competitive.

Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) insisted trust is critical to the process of educational improvement, but seemingly difficult to achieve and maintain in educational systems. When colleagues are comfortable taking risks and exposing vulnerabilities, they are more likely to seek support and feedback, express problems, and be creative and innovative while connecting to others throughout the organization (Bryk & Scheider, 2002; Edmondson, 2004). Daly and Finnigan (2012) emphasized the influence of trust on systemic improvement: “our data suggest that when trust was present, it was critical in predicting reciprocated best practice relationships. This suggests that ties imbued with trust are important in supporting reciprocated relations that can support the deepening of exchanges toward improvement” (p. 517).

Finnigan and Daly (2017) later extended this to the work of school district leaders and contended, “Ensuring principals are well connected and supported may be one of the most important roles of central office leaders, as the support of and care for principals directly affects the lives of teachers” (p. 28). Similarly, Coffin and Leithwood (2000) explored the job-embedded learning of principals and determined that trusting interpersonal relationships between principals and central office administrators enhanced both principal performance and learning. While relations with district administrators who were aloof or distant inhibited both learning and
leading for principals. In conclusion, Finnigan and Daly (2017) succinctly articulated the influence of interpersonal connections on organizations and initiatives with, “both innovation and improvement require risk taking and idea sharing, but underlying emotional connections are critical in helping the technical aspects of work to take hold” (p. 29). Personal and professional trust between leaders tasked with implementing change is a key factor influencing the level of success experienced by innovative organizations.

The previous sections provided an overview of the themes found in the literature related to the factors influencing superintendent turnover, the impact of this change, and the importance of trust in leadership. The themes in the scholarship related to superintendent turnover informed this design of this study, while the theoretical frameworks applied to the findings of this inquiry will inform the understandings garnered from this research. The next section will introduce the analytical theories I will utilize to analyze the findings in this study.

**Analytical Theory**

I analyzed my findings using the following three theoretical frames: William Bridges’ (2016) Bridges Transition Model, Bolman and Deal’s (2017) Four-Frame Model, and Forsyth et al.’s (2011) Collective Trust Model. I selected these theories or frameworks based on their broad applicability to education and organizational settings and their relevance to the themes which emerged from my literature review. In addition, each has withstood the test of time and contributed significantly to the research and scholarship related to leadership and organizational change. I begin with Bridges’ (2016) model involving transition because this serves as an overarching framework for understanding not only what superintendents experienced but also how those left behind adapted to the change.
Bridges’ Transition Model

The Bridges (2016) Transition Model starts from the premise that change and transition are not synonymous terms. William Bridges asserted that change is situational and external to the individual experiencing the change, such as relocating business facilities, implementing a new reporting or evaluation system, or losing a loved one. Transition, on the other hand, is an internal and psychological process that involves a person’s emotional response to a change in their personal or professional life: such as, “What did I lose as a result of the relocation?”; “What will the new evaluation system say about me as a professional?”; or “Who am I without my spouse?” As a result, a personal or organizational change can only be actualized after those involved in the change have moved through the three phases of transition outlined in the Bridges Transition model (Bridges, 2016). For any change to take hold, people have to move through the transitional phases, including a) endings or letting go of the past, followed by b) the neutral zone where the past doesn’t apply and the new reality has not yet materialized, and finally enter c) the new beginning. While a change in the superintendency is a situational factor external to building and district administrators, they must work through the phases of transition during this turnover in district leadership for the organization to move forward in support of the new superintendent’s vision for the school district.

William Bridges (2016) has been supporting organizations and individuals dealing with major business, professional, or personal change as a consultant since 1981. Bridges first published his now-classic work Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change in 1991, introducing the Bridges Transition Model to audiences worldwide. The author of several books and many articles, Bridges was widely considered a thought leader in the field of organization and personal transition. The Bridges Transition Model extends from the assertion that change is a
situational and external influence in an organization or person’s life, like a corporate merger or getting a new boss or superintendent (Bridges, 2016). However, transition is an internal and psychological process individuals go through personally or professionally as a result of a change. William Bridges (2016) went as far as to assert that “Change works only when it is accompanied by transition” (p. 10). Bridges explained:

*Transition is not just a nice way to say change. It is the inner process through which people come to terms with a change, as they let go of how things used to be and reorient themselves to the way that things are now. In an organization, managing transition means helping people to make that difficult process less painful and disruptive.* (William Bridges Assoc., 2020)

Bridges expounded on this, expressing that most people and leaders are much more focused on the change that is happening to them or in the organization, but not the transition they experience internally. Meanwhile, Brisson-Banks (2010) highlighted the importance of the Bridges Transition Model: “Often change models neglect the transition that is required to occur within the individuals in the organization during the actual change process. It is important to include this human element in the change process.” (p. 247).

The Bridges Transition Model identifies three phases of transition people must experience when working through change in their personal or professional life a) “endings or letting go of the past” followed by b) “the neutral zone where the past does not apply and the new reality has not yet materialized” and finally enter c) “the new beginning” (Bridges, 2016). Often, organizations and individuals focus on the change that is being implemented or taking place, and neglect to take time working through the internal transition process that allows for the
change to be actualized. A visual representation of the three phases of transition is presented in Figure 2.

**Figure 2**

*The Three Phases of Transition*

![The Three Phases of Transition](image)

*Source.* William Bridges Assoc. (2020)

**Endings, Losing, and Letting Go**

Bridges (2016) contended that transitions are the internal, emotional response individuals have to a change, which starts first with something ending, before the individual or organization can move into what is intended to be a new circumstance or organizational reality. Bridges explained how transitions require individuals to experience and process endings, losing, and letting go.

The transition—the psychological reorientation that people must go through to make the change work—does not start with a new situation. It starts when the affected people let go of their old situation. Endings come first. You can’t do something new until you have let go of what you are currently doing. Even the transitions that come from “good”
changes begin with losses of some sort, for letting go of the old way is experienced by the people who were used to it as a loss. (William Bridges Assoc., 2020)

Bridges (2019) reiterated that endings must come before new beginnings expressing that “new growth cannot take root on ground still covered with the old habits, attitudes, and outlooks because endings are the clearing process” (p.110).

During the ending phase, individuals must make peace with letting go of their old identities and ways of being to be able to move into the new way of being, working and thinking. This is true for individuals in their personal and professional life. Whether processing through an organizational change, a job change, or the loss of a close relationship, people have to accept that not all of who they were and identified as in the past organizational structure, job, or relationship will transfer or be healthy in their new role or relationship. “You have to end before you can begin … if you skip this step transitions take much longer than they should have” (William Bridges Assoc., 2020).

According to the Bridges Transition Model transitions begin with endings, while superintendent turnover begins with an announcement. The participants in this study had to process through endings following the school board announcement their superintendent was separating from the school district as the result of retirement, resignation or a non-continuation of their contract. Statistically educators and administrators in Minnesota will have to process this type of ending every 5.75 years (Gundlach, 2016). In my study, the administrator experience with this type of ending varied based on several factors to include the level of personal and professional trust participants report existed with the outgoing superintendent. The endings brought on by the announcement of superintendent turnover were followed by a neutral zone experience for participants, during the superintendent search and selection process.
The Neutral Zone

According to Bridges (2020) the neutral zone is a time of dysregulation for many people and organizations where individuals find themselves caught in a space where old identities and ways of working or being no longer apply to or fit the new circumstances, but the new reality has also not yet taken hold.

After the ending, people go into the second phase of transition, the neutral zone. This is a no-man’s land where people are (in Matthew Arnold’s graphic image) “Wandering between two worlds, one dead, the other powerless to be born.” The neutral zone is a time and a state of being in which the old behaviors and attitudes die out, and people go dormant for a while as they prepare to move out in a new direction. It is a dangerous time for organizations, but it is also a time when innovations and experiments have an especially good chance of succeeding. (William Bridges Assoc., 2020)

Bridges offered the example of Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt and into the wilderness as a way of understanding the neutral zone. According to Bridges interpretation of this historic Judaical case study, the Israelites had to wonder the wilderness for 40 years until those who knew Egypt and the old ways had died before they could enter the promised land. The old ways and mindsets had to be eradicated from the Israelites to ready them for their new beginning. In spite of the perils encountered in the wilderness, Moses and the tribes of Israel found new ways to organize and govern themselves, making them more prepared to succeed when they finally settled down, in the promised land. The neutral zone is a time of both dysregulation and dynamic opportunity to reimagine or redefine an organization or individual.

In Exodus, the creative aspect of the wilderness is embodied in the holy mountain, Mt. Sinai. Moses climbed that mountain alone to receive divine guidance, and he returned
from those visits with the Ten Commandments, a different value-system that became the basis for a new Jewish culture...Moses capitalized on that space to elaborate the Ten Commandments into a new culture, and in the process launched history’s first recorded culture change efforts (William Bridges Assoc., 2020).

While the journey of the Israelites through the wilderness serves as a case study in organizational culture change, William bridges summarized the neutral zone and the opportunities for innovation it provides with “it is during these in-between times, the states of wilderness that open up between the demise of an old order and the birth of a new one, that innovation is most likely to occur in any organization” (William Bridges Assoc., 2020). After processing the losses related to the endings in the first phase of transition, individuals and organizations must successfully navigate the uncertainty and opportunity of the neutral zone before they can start a new beginning.

The participants in this study entered a transition neutral zone when their school boards began their search process for the next superintendent. This was a time when the old ways organizing and working as a leadership team had diminished influence as the school districts in this study worked through the superintendent selection process to determine who would define the vision and mission of the district going forward. Several studies (Alsbury, 2008; Finnigan & Daly, 2017; Natkin, 2002; Vasquez, 2017) found that frequent superintendent turnover led to an implementation or change paralysis in some school districts and diminished trust between staff and district leadership. This may have been the result of staff feeling like the Israelites stuck in a neutral zone experience, wandering the wilderness, with frequent starts and stops to implementing new district visions with each superintendent turnover. For participants in this study the neutral zone extended from the time their district’s superintendent search and selection
process began until the new district leader was formally installed as superintendent, initiating a new beginning.

**New Beginnings**

According to Bridges (2016), most individuals and organizations focus on the change being implemented and not the transition it will take to actualize that change. When this happens, organizations and individuals undermine the change efforts to which they are committing time and resources.

Letting go, repatterning, and making a new a beginning: together these processes reorient and renew people when things are changing all around them. You need the transition that they add up to for the change to get under the surface of things and affect how people actually work. Without them, there may be dust and noise, but when things quiet down and the dust settles, nothing is really different. (Bridges, 2016, p. 10)

Bridges contended that new beginnings are only possible after successful transitions, insisting:

Most organizations, however, pay no attention to endings, don’t acknowledge the neutral zone (and try to avoid it), and do nothing to help people make a fresh, new beginning, even as they trumpet changes. Then they wonder why their people have so much difficulty with change. (p. 10)

The implementation of change within organizations is dependent on the individuals within the organization working through the transition process. This introspective process must be tended to for the intended change to materialize. This requires planning, patience, and attention to both organizational and individual needs. Bridges (2016) insisted that beginnings are psychological phenomena, which result in the release of new energy and direction with an organization and are an expression of a new identity. “Beginnings are strange things. People want them to happen but
fear them at the same time” (Bridges, 2016, p. 66). Bridges asserted that beginnings are the result of an organic process and do not happen by edict or memorandum. “They happen when the timing of the transition process allows them to happen … Only when you get into people’s shoes and feel what they are feeling can you help them to manage their transition” (p. 68). The Bridges Transition Model provides leaders or managers with strategies for nourishing and cultivating successful new beginnings, “but this isn’t a trip from one side of the street to the other. It’s a journey from one identity to another, and that kind of journey takes time” (p. 49).

In this study, the installment of the new superintendent signaled the start of the final transitional phase, a new beginning. During this phase administrators begin to work alongside the new district leader and in support of the district vision and mission set forth by this superintendent. The participants in this study entered this phase looking for affirmations of the establishment of trust with their new leader, which aligned to the work of Daly and Finnigan (2012) who found that trust is a precondition for establishing the organizational conditions that promote systemic learning and improvements. How participants in this study process and work through the transition brought on by change in their district’s superintendency will be analyzed through the application of the Bridges Transition Model. The next theoretical framework I discuss is the Bolman and Deal Four-Frames Model.

**The Four Frames Model in Organizational Leadership**

Bolman and Deal’s (2017) Four-Frames Model classify the primary mental models influencing leaders of organizations and impacting not only their decision making, but also govern their interpersonal and professional interactions with stakeholders. Since the story of any superintendent change involves a variety of leaders within a school district and school board, it is important to understand that each may be operating out of differing leadership frames as they
navigate a decision-making process and the resulting consequences of their involvement in any
decision (Bolman & Deal, 2017). The four-frames model allows for the analysis and
understanding of what mental models and priorities may be influencing both the decision makers
and their reactions to the outcomes of their decisions.

Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal first published their seminal work, *Reframing
Organizations: Artistry, Choice and Leadership* in 1991, introducing corporate leaders and
scholars to the four-frames model. The 6th edition of this work was published in 2017, reiterating
the staying power and sustained relevance of their framework. The four-frames model is the
biprodact of input from “thousands of managers and scores of organizations” coupled with social
science research to “identify ideas that work in practice” (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 16). The
process of developing this model “sorted insights from both research and practice into four major
frames—structural, human resources, political, and symbolic” (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p.16). In
doing so, Bolman and Deal introduced four prevailing mental models or lenses leaders use to
approach their work and make decisions. The “frames serve multiple functions. They are
sources of new questions, filters for sorting essence from trivia, maps that aid navigation, and
tools for solving problems and getting things done” (p. 23).

Additionally, Bolman and Deal (2017) concluded, “each frame is powerful and coherent.
Collectively, they make it possible to reframe, looking at the same thing from multiple lenses or
points of view” (p. 23). The structural frame focuses on the architecture of organizations—the
institutional infrastructure, groupings, rules, roles, goals, and policies. The human resources
frame insists on understanding your people/employees, “their strengths and foibles, reason and
emotion, desires and fears” (p. 23). Meanwhile, the political frame approaches organizations as
competitive entities pursuing limited resources and competing interests, while engaged in a
struggle for power and advantage. Finally, the symbolic frame “focuses on issues of meaning and faith,” placing “ritual, ceremony, story, play, and culture at the heart of organizational life” (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 23). Table 1 provides an overview of the four-frames model, and identifies examples of a) metaphor for organization, b) supporting scholarly disciplines, c) central concepts, d) an image of leadership, e) the basic leadership challenge, f) the organizational ethic, and g) the leadership contribution for each of the Four-Fames. For example, the organizational metaphor for the structural frame is a “factory or machine”, the human resources frame is represented by “family”, the political frame’s organizational metaphor is “jungle”, and the symbolic frame is metaphorically portrayed as a “carnival, temple or theater”. Another element of the Four-Frames Model outlined in table 1 is the leadership contribution of leaders operating out of each frame. Structural frame minded leaders contribute authorship, while human resource oriented leaders operate out of love, political frame centric leaders contribute power, and symbolic leaders provide significance. The focus of this study is on how leaders in small school districts experience superintendent turnover. The elements outlined in the following table provide insight for analyzing how these school leaders make meaning of the transitions they experienced.
Table 1
Overview of the Four-Frames Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structural</th>
<th>Human Resources</th>
<th>Political</th>
<th>Symbolic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Metaphor for</strong></td>
<td><strong>Factory or machine</strong></td>
<td><strong>Family</strong></td>
<td><strong>Jungle</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organization</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sociology, management science</strong></td>
<td><strong>Psychology</strong></td>
<td><strong>Political science</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supporting</strong></td>
<td><strong>Roles, rules, goals, strategies, policies, technology, environment</strong></td>
<td><strong>Needs, skills, relationships</strong></td>
<td><strong>Power, conflict, competition, politics</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>disciplines</strong></td>
<td><strong>Social architecture</strong></td>
<td><strong>Empowerment</strong></td>
<td><strong>Advocacy and political savvy</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Central concepts</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Align organizational and human needs</strong></td>
<td><strong>Develop agenda and power base</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Image of</strong></td>
<td><strong>Attune structure to task, technology, environment</strong></td>
<td><strong>Leadership</strong></td>
<td><strong>Create faith, belief, beauty, meaning</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>leadership</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Basic</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>leadership</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>challenge</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organizational</strong></td>
<td><strong>Excellence</strong></td>
<td><strong>Caring</strong></td>
<td><strong>Justice</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ethic</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership</strong></td>
<td><strong>Authorship</strong></td>
<td><strong>Love</strong></td>
<td><strong>Power</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>contribution</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Significance</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source.* Bolman & Deal (2017, p. 20)

The application of the four-frames model to understanding superintendent turnover and how it is experienced by school and district leaders provides a framework for exploring how a common phenomenon might be experienced and interpreted very differently by individual leaders. Moreover, it provided language and an interpretive lens for unpacking how leaders in
small, single high school, school districts anticipate and experience turnover in the superintendency. Additionally, the four-frames model allowed for consideration of which frame individuals engaged in organization change relied on more dominantly. Various frames were used to analyze the actions of leaders throughout the exit of the former district leader and installation of a new superintendent.

Additionally, Bolman and Deal (2017) provided some insights on how leaders might navigate organizational change. They outlined both organizational or psychological barriers to change and provide some essential strategies leaders can engage while guiding their organizations though transitions. Leaders have an obligation to lead through organizational change, even when they may be experiencing their own emotions and insecurities as a result of the change. The obligation to shepherd colleagues through a change in the superintendency while also privately processing their own feelings and concerns is a unique leadership yoke to bear. Bolman and deal offer ideas for reframing organizational change, which is reflected in table 2. For example, barriers to change for the human development frame are “anxiety, uncertainty, and people feeling incompetent and needy”. They propose essential strategies for reframing these barriers to change from the human resource frame are a) training to develop new skills, b) participation and involvement, and c) psychological support. Table 2 outlines barriers to change and provides essential strategies leaders can employ for each leadership frame.
Table 2

Reframing Organizational Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame</th>
<th>Barriers to Change</th>
<th>Essential Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human</td>
<td>Anxiety, uncertainty; people feel incompetent and needy</td>
<td>Training to develop new skills; participation and involvement; psychological support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>Loss of direction, clarity, and stability; confusion,</td>
<td>Communicating, realigning, and renegotiating formal patterns and policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>chaos</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural</td>
<td>Disempowerment; conflict between winners and losers</td>
<td>Developing arenas where issues can be renegotiated and new coalitions formed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political</td>
<td>Loss of meaning and purpose; clinging to the past</td>
<td>Creating transition rituals; mourning the past, celebrating the future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbolic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source. Bolman and Deal (2017, p. 320)

Leading through these challenges requires leaders to operate out of multiple frames, considering the complexity and sometimes competing needs of stakeholders during times of uncertainty. Thompson (2000) advocated for versatility:

[E]ducational leaders who utilize three or four leadership frames … are perceived to be more effective in their leadership role. Thus, those who demonstrate the ability to encompass the cognitive complexity or use of multiple leadership frames associated with the ability to reconcile the competing demands of the working environment, yield a more effective leadership style than those who rely upon one or two leadership frames. (pp. 983–984)

Bolman and Deal (1991) addressed the importance of leaders being able to lead reflectively and out of multiple frames:
when their frames of reference fit the circumstances, they can understand and shape human experience. When they do not, their frames freeze into a distorted picture that traps them in their misconceptions. They explain failure by blaming circumstances rather than questioning their own inability to read and respond to the situation at hand. (p. 510)

Examining the findings in the literature review, Bolman and Deal’s (2017) four frames helped me to interpret or reframe questions of study related to the following themes: a) the impact of size, b) the labor market forces that influence superintendent turnover, and c) how trust may be influenced by a leader’s perceived effective use of the four-frames.

Several studies (Alsbury, 2004; Byrd, 2006; Grissom, 2012, 2016; Kamrath, 2007, 2014) presented a clear pattern of superintendent movement toward larger, more prestigious and suburban or urban school districts. When considering these findings and the four-frames model, questions for future study arise: are there dominant leadership frames associated with or correlated to superintendent movement trends? Additionally, are there organizational demands, related to the movement toward larger and more suburban school districts that preference, or pressure a leader to operate out of a prevailing frame? The next question of study related to the themes that emerged from the literature review and the four-frames model is, to what extent does a superintendent’s effective or ineffective utilization of Bolman and Deal’s leadership frames influence the push-pull factors that contribute to superintendent turnover? Is there data to show that effective utilization of multiple leadership frames contributes to pull factors that draw a district leader to consider new opportunities outside of their current assignment. Conversely, could there be a correlation between a superintendent’s ineffective utilization of the leadership frames and push factors that lead to a school board to consider separation or non-continuation with an existing superintendent. Finally, Bolman and Deal (2017) promote the importance of
efficacious leaders being adept at operating out of multiple leadership frames. Several scholars (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Daly & Finnigan, 2012; Edmondson, 2004; Fukuyama, 1995; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000) found that trust is a precondition and organizational lubricant for achieving innovation and successfully implementing change. Relatedly, I explored the connection between superintendents’ perceived ability to operate out of multiple leadership frames and how this influenced the establishment of trust with the administrators in this study. The final theoretical framework I used to analyze the findings in this study is the Collective Trust Model, which is presented in the next section.

The Power of Collective Trust

Forsyth et al.’s (2011) Collective Trust Model provides a framework for understanding and assessing the impact of superintendent change on a school district and the leaders who are responsible for leading through and after this change. Forsyth et al. (2011) introduced the theory of collective trust and provided the following definition:

Formally, we define collective trust as a stable group property rooted in the shared perceptions and affect about the trustworthiness of another group or individual that emerges over time out of multiple social exchanges within the group. These socially constructed shared trust beliefs define the group’s willingness to be vulnerable to another group or individual. (p. 22)

The collective trust model provides a structure for assessing the level of and factors influencing the collective trust in organizations.

Forsyth et al.’s (2011) Collective Trust Model is the biproduct of 30 years of research on the importance of trust in schools and was collaboratively developed by three generations of researchers, including Hoy with his student, Patrick Forsythe, along with his student, Curt
Adams. The researchers started with a definition of trust that has been synthesized through their research and incorporates the key elements of the work of their contemporaries on defining trust. Trust is “a state in which individuals and groups are willing to make themselves vulnerable to others and take risks with confidence that others will respond to their actions in positive ways, that is, with benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness” (Forsyth et al., 2011, pp. 19–20).

Tschannen-Moran (2014), who collaborated extensively with Hoy, emphasized the importance of trust in schools, offering that “trust is a glue that holds things together, as well as a lubricant that reduces friction and facilitates smooth operations. Trust is also a choice that involves risk” (p. 44). Forsyth et al. (2011) asserted, “We want to make the case that in many organizations trust between groups plays a particularly germane role in effective operation and goal achievement” (p. 20). Adding that collective trust is critical in organizations with highly interdependent groups who share tasks and work with high levels of complexity and uncertainty. Tschannen-Moran (2014) echoed this, insisting that “in situations of interdependence, when you have to rely to some extent on someone else to achieve the outcome you desire, you want to feel confident that the other person is benevolent, honest, open, reliable and competent” (p. 44).

These scholarly works emphasized the importance and influence of trust in organizations.

From these foundational premises, Forsyth et al. (2011) developed the theory of collective trust, describing this phenomenon as an established set of group beliefs and shared perceptions of the trustworthiness of others and groups within an organization that emerges over time and out of multiple social exchanges within and between groups. They offered that collective trust differs from personal trust because it is not an individual cognitive construction, rather it is social phenomenon constructed from recurring verbal and nonverbal interactions
among group members and individuals. Forsyth et al. (2011) further explained, “out of multiple exchanges over time, a group consensus emerges producing socially constructed, shared, collective trust beliefs about another group or individual, which have important consequences (e.g. academic optimism, student achievement, and collective efficacy)” (p. 26).

Forsyth et al. (2011) developed the collective trust model to be a relevant construct for analyzing social organizations that focus on groups within larger social entities. These scholars posited:

Collective trust is an especially useful construct for studying organizations composed of interdependent groups, often organized by role or organizational function…Organizations like public schools are made up of role groups that are highly interdependent, which contributes to their complexity and unpredictability. (p. 26)

Forsyth et al. insisted these elements increase the need for high levels of collective trust to be present in schools if they are to achieve collective success and efficacy. These researchers argued that without trust schools are likely to fail at providing constructive educational opportunities and environments, while attempting to meet the rigorous challenges public schools face in meeting diverse learning needs in a pluralist society. Primarily, according to Tschannen-Moran (2014), “because the energy needed to solve the complex problem of educating a diverse group of students is diverted toward self-protection” (p. 14).

The collective trust model focuses on how groups in organizations perceive other groups and individuals, and the consequences of this socially constructed operational schema. Forsyth et al. (2011) contended when collective trust is present in a social network, communication and psychological safety are enhanced, providing a leader with the social capital to lead reform efforts. They insisted,
Collective trust … facilitates cooperative interactions across role boundaries and unites individuals around a common vision. Both effects need to be leveraged in order to achieve the level of reform necessary to make schools responsive to the changing needs of a global and information-based society. (p. 130)

Forsyth et al. explain the social construction of collective trust among interdependent functional groups is dependent on the elements of organizational or social context and social exchange. Within the element of context there are three contextual factors that contribute to the social construction of collective trust: external context, internal context and task context. External context refers to the environmental, political and societal forces that shape the values, attitudes and expectations of individual group members. Internal context is the sum of the forces within an organization that shape the value, attitudes and expectations of individuals and groups inside the organization. Task context refers to how dependent groups are affected and influenced by the nature of their work or assigned task/function within the organization. These contextual elements are coupled with repeated social exchanges between individuals and groups to shape the level of collective trust that develops in an organization. Collective trust is a socially constructed perspective that reflects a group’s consensus about the trustworthiness of another group, which becomes a shared belief. Forsyth et al. (2011) contend that these socially constructed shared beliefs influence individual and group behavior and have significant consequences both positively and negatively on intergroup cooperation and organizational success. The collective trust model positions collective trust between the internal, external and task contextual forces in an organization and the attainment of the desired organizational outcomes or success. Figure 3 provides a depiction of the collective trust model in action, summarizing the key elements and consequences of collective trust in schools.
Tschannen-Moran (2014) assert that trustworthy leadership is essential in establishing productive schools and allows for schools to meet the challenges they are faced with on a daily basis. Additionally, Forsyth et al. (2011) reinforced this arguing there is empirical evidence that level of trust colleagues have in their leaders significantly influences an organizations productivity and effectiveness. Moreover, they asserted that:

To understand the process of social construction of collective trust, it is instructive to consider what happens when an outsider attempts to become a member of an existing group within a larger organization. In this situation, the social construction of the group’s trust for another is already in place. (p. 30)
The principals in this study lived through a superintendent transition and their levels of trust were inevitably influenced by their experiences with the outgoing superintendent and the organizational, social, and professional climate established by that leader.

Forsyth et al. (2011) provided a means for understanding how leadership influences outcomes and contended that cooperative behaviors in schools is the product of, or flows from, three leadership sources. They explained a school or organizational leader draws from the following three leadership sources: Formal control, informal control, and collective trust. Formal control relates to the establishment of roles, rules, policies, and procedures perceived to enable smooth and effective organizational operation (Forsyth et al., 2011). Informal control is the result of a leader’s ability to be influential and persuasive, while championing the district’s vision and mission in alignment with the collective values of the organization and community.

The final source of leadership influence is collective trust, which is a leader’s ability to elicit and nurture faculty trust through behaving in trustworthy ways, by modeling benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness. According to Forsyth et al. (2011), when a leader is attentive to and draws from each of these leadership sources, they are often rewarded with increased staff cooperation, which leads to organizational predictability and flexibility, which ultimately increases the effectiveness of the organization. They explained, “trust in leadership has multiple significant and positive outcomes, including its ability to elicit from employees altruism, civic virtue, conscientiousness, courtesy, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, belief in information provided by the leader and commitment to decisions” (Forsyth et al., 2011, p. 117). The collective trust model explains the formation of group shared beliefs of the trustworthiness of others and groups in an organization, and the significant influence it has on organizational outcomes and productivity.
The research and scholarship that contributed to the formation of the collective trust model aligns closely with the theme of *trust and leadership-trust matters* that arose from my review of the literature. Several studies (Aguallard & Goughnour, 2006; Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Edmondson, 2004; Fukuyama, 1995; Mintrop & Trujillo, 2007; Reagans & McEvily, 2003; Spilline et al., 2006; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000) discussed in the literature review under this theme reinforce and contributed to the development of the collective trust model. In addition, the theme of *perceived reality* explored studies on stakeholder and superintendent perspectives on the causes of superintendent turnover. A consistent perspective for stakeholders and superintendents was that a superintendent’s relationship with the school board, and specifically the board chair, was a significantly influential factor in superintendent turnover. Based on the collective trust model, assessing the level of collective trust between these interdependent roles (school board/board chair and superintendent) could explain this finding. Nonetheless, low levels of collective trust within a school district or between a school board and the superintendent can certainly be considered a push factor, which was discussed in the literature review theme of *labor market forces and push-pull factors*. In these circumstances the collective trust model could be applied to determine if the external, internal, and task contextual elements could be adjusted to support the development of greater collective trust when the collective trust between the superintendent and the school board is low. Next, I provided a summary of this chapter before moving on to an examination of the methodology of this study in chapter three.

**Summary**

An examination of the literature and scholarship on superintendent turnover revealed three primary themes: factors influencing superintendent turnover, impacts on the system and
trust and leadership – trust matters. The literature indicated that the size of a school district and the type of community correlates with superintendent movement. Superintendents tend to move toward larger, more prestigious suburban and urban school districts from smaller rural districts and communities. There was also a reported increase in salary associated with superintendent movement, which could be explained as one of the labor market forces that influence superintendent movement. Salary, district size, political influence, and prestige were often considered pull factors that inspire or entice superintendents to move from one job to another. Conversely, political factors such as community dissatisfaction or a contentious relationship between the superintendent and school board were cited as example of push factors that influence superintendents to consider moving on. According to the literature superintendent turnover can have a negative impact on school district morale and performance, especially when there is frequent turnover at the top in school districts. Lastly, both the literature and the collective trust model reinforced the importance of trust in leadership as catalyst for organizational success and efficacy. The scholarly theories of the Bridges Transition Model, the four-frames model and the collective trust model provide theoretical frameworks for understanding how individuals in organizations experience and process both changes in their organizational or personal life and the internal and psychological transitions that accompany these changes. The subsequent chapter presents the research traditions and methodology used to explore the research question: How do principals in single high school, school districts, with enrollments less than 8750 students, experience the phenomenon of superintendent turnover, and how are they impacted by this change?
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

I investigated how principals in single high school, school districts, with enrollments less than 8750 students, experience the phenomenon of superintendent turnover, and how are they impacted by this change. I examined the perceived effects of superintendent change on principals, in small school districts, as they navigated the potential turbulence caused by change in the superintendency. I adopted a qualitative research methodology and approached this study using phenomenology. Phenomenology proved useful in understanding how district leaders experience change at the highest level in the school district. In the next two sections, I describe why I selected qualitative research methodology and the phenomenological tradition.

Qualitative Research

I conducted this inquiry using a qualitative research method rather than quantitative methods. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) reported that qualitative research originates from the anthropological and sociological traditions, and it focuses on a holistic approach to studying a phenomenon and social structures in the context of their settings. They insisted that, “the overall purposes of qualitative research are to achieve an understanding of how people make sense out of their lives, delineate the process (rather than the outcome or product) of meaning-making, and describe how people interpret what they experience” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 15). Lochmiller and Lester (2017) offered that qualitative methodologies are comprised of a variety of interpretive, inductive approaches to understanding the human experience. These scholars contended, “the term qualitative methodologies is an umbrella term that brings together methodologies that share some assumptions about how to make sense of the world and the types of data that help researcher interpret the world” (p. 15). They pointed out that these approaches
are exploratory in nature and that the researcher should be considered the primary research instrument.

Contrariwise, Hancock and Algonzzine (2017) asserted that “most fundamentally, quantitative researchers use numbers, normally in the form of statistics, to explain phenomena” (p. 5). Lochmiller and Lester (2017) described quantitative methodologies as deductive approaches to investigate human experience. This experience is “typically represented in numerical data … [following] a positivist paradigm, meaning that the purpose of the research is intended to uncover the truth rather than construct truth, as in qualitative research, through the interpretation of data. (p. 15)

Conversely, Creswell and Poth (2018) informed my decision to focus on qualitative measures for this study, stating:

We also use qualitative research when quantitative measures and the statistical analyses simply do not fit the problem. Interactions among people, for example, are difficult to capture with existing measures, and these measures may not be sensitive to issues such as gender differences, race, economic status and individual differences. (p. 46)

In this study, I sought to understand how school administrators and district leaders experience turnover in the superintendency. This research inquiry guided me toward qualitative methodology to better understand this complex human experience.

Creswell and Poth (2018) argued that qualitative research is most appropriate when we are looking for a complex, detailed understanding that can only be achieved through talking to people and letting them tell their stories. They explained, “We conduct qualitative research when we want to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study” (p. 45).
Furthermore, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) reported that a key attribute of qualitative research is the perspective that individuals construct reality as a result of their interactions with their social world and environment. They further suggested that “Constructivism thus underlies what we are calling a basic qualitative study. Here the researcher is interested in understanding the meaning a phenomenon has for those involved” (p. 24). They insisted that qualitative researchers are interested in studying: “(1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences. The overall purpose is to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 24).

Lochmiller and Lester (2017) asserted qualitative researchers often engage in their inquiry from a constructivist paradigm which “assumes that there are multiple realities that can be studied, and that the researcher derives his or her understanding of these realities by working with and through the participants’ perspectives of a given phenomenon or problem of practice” (p.13). Creswell and Poth (2018) concluded, “when researchers conduct qualitative research, they are embracing the idea of multiple realities” (p. 20). They also insisted qualitative researchers proceed with the intention of reporting on the multiple realities they uncover in their studies. These scholars contended, “this is how knowledge is known – through the subjective experiences of people” (p. 21). Relatedly, Lochmiller and Lester (2017) offered qualitative research introduces “researcher-generated data,” which is data that would not exist if not for the researcher’s role and effort in gathering the data. Lochmiller and Lester pointed out that, “for instance, interview data are only possible because you asked specific questions that resulted in the participant’s responses” (p. 100).
In addition to the view that qualitative research uncovers multiple participant perspectives and meanings, researchers Creswell and Poth (2018), Lochmiller and Lester (2017), Marriam and Tisdell (2016) outlined some additional common elements of qualitative studies that relate to my journey to understand how principals and district leaders experience superintendent turnover. Qualitative research is context-dependent and seeks to uncover a holistic understanding of the phenomenon being studied (cite). There is an acute focus on the specific context in which the study is being conducted.

Lochmiller and Lester (2017) stated qualitative research studies “recognize that human behaviors and actions are not isolated from their environments; rather, they are considered in relation to their environments” (p. 97). Additionally, the goal of qualitative research is to develop a holistic perspective, constructing a complex image of the phenomena or issue being studied, “generally sketching the larger picture that emerges. Researchers are bound not by cause-and-effect relationships among factors but rather by describing the complex interactions of factors in any situation” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 44). Creswell and Poth (2018) introduced the metaphor of qualitative research as an “intricate fabric comprising minute threads, many colors, different textures, and various blends of material. This fabric is not explained easily or simply. Like the loom on which fabric is woven, general assumptions and interpretive frameworks hold qualitative research together” (p. 41). Adopting an emergent approach to qualitative research, I adopted phenomenology to focus on how participants experienced and make meaning of the changes in superintendency in small districts.

**Phenomenology**

In this study, I sought to understand how principals experience the phenomenon of superintendent turnover. I adopted phenomenology to uncover how principals and district leaders
navigated and lead others through episodes of change and the leadership actions taken during this process. Both research goals fit well within the phenomenological tradition because “phenomenology is a qualitative methodology that applies a philosophical perspective to the study of human experience” (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017, p. 110). Lochmiller and Lester (2017) asserted that the purpose of a phenomenological study is to refine a phenomenon or human experience down to the essence of the experience, which is the commonly experienced portion of a phenomenon. Moustakas (1994) introduced the search for the “essence of the experience” as the central role of phenomenology, with a focus on learning what was experienced, and how it was experienced. Sokolowski (2000) explained, “phenomenology is the study of human experience and of the ways things present themselves to us in and through such experience” (p. 2). Lochmiller and Lester (2017) reminded us that,

a constructivist paradigm assumes that there are multiple realities that can be studied, and that the researcher derives his or her understanding of these realities by working with and through the participants’ perspectives of a given phenomenon or problem of practice. (p. 13)

Relatedly, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) contended phenomenologists are not interested in quantifying or reducing an experience into abstract laws of science, rather they seek to understand the lived experience of those under study. They emphasized, “The task of the phenomenologist, then, is to depict the essence or basic structure of an experience” (p. 26). Creswell and Poth (2018) described the role of the phenomenological inquirer as one who collects data from those who have experienced a phenomenon, then develops a composite description of the essence of the experience. They insisted, “phenomenology is not only a description, but it is also an interpretive process in which the researcher makes an interpretation
of the meaning of the lived experiences” (p. 78). Moustakas (1994) concurred, stating
“intentional experience incorporates a real content and an ideal content, in and through which we
dwell in thought, perception, memory, judgement and feeling, in order to comprehend its
essences” (p. 55). Phenomenology strives to provide a description of experiences, not simply
explain them, focused on the texture of the original experience with a phenomenon. Furthermore,
Moustakas contended the thoughts, experiences, emotions, intuitions, judgements, and
reflections of the individuals who interacted with the phenomena are the primary source data a
phenomenological study is built on. While Merriam and Tisdell (2016) offered the following
explanation of phenomenology: “A phenomenological study seeks understanding about the
essence and the underlying structure of the phenomenon” (p. 24).

Additionally, van Manen (2014) asserted phenomenology is not just a philosophical
perspective, it is a method of questioning the meaning of life and the way we live as social
creatures. He added, “nothing is more meaningful than the quest for meaning, the mystery of
meaning, how meaning originates and occurs” (p. 13). He further explained appreciation and
respect for this qualitative tradition and the curiosity it demands is with, “Phenomenology is
about wonder, words and world” (p. 13). Merraim and Tisdell (2016) argued the philosophy of
phenomenology is an underpinning of qualitative research and therefore, to some extent, all
qualitative research is phenomenological in nature. They offered, “from the philosophy of
phenomenology comes a focus on the experience itself and how experiencing something is
transformed into consciousness” (p. 25).

The Hermeneutical and Transcendental Phenomenological Traditions

Creswell (2018) offered that the origins of phenomenological research can be found in
the writings of the German mathematician Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). Many scholars and
researchers contributed to the development of the phenomenological research tradition since, from Sartre and Heidegger to contemporaries like Moustakas and van Manen. Today, phenomenology is often classified into one of two primary types or traditions: hermeneutical or transcendental phenomenology. Creswell (2018) attributed much of the development of the hermeneutical approach to van Manen (1990, 2014), while recognizing Moustakas (1994) as a key contributor to the establishment of transcendental phenomenology.

Hermeneutical phenomenology is oriented toward interpreting lived experiences. van Manen (2014) asserted that in his work “the term *phenomenology* should usually be taken as ‘hermeneutic or interpretive-descriptive phenomenology’” (p. 26). He posited that “phenomenology is more a method of questioning than answering, realizing that insights come to us in that mode of musing, reflective questioning, and being obsessed with the sources and meanings of lived experiences” (p. 27). This approach to phenomenology is biased toward the interpretation of lived experiences and seeks to make meaning in the experiences of everyday life. van Manen (2014) considered all lived experiences as text and sources of examination:

> A phenomenological question may arise any time we have a certain experience that brings us to pause and reflect. Even the most ordinary experience may bring us to a sense of wonder … and thus it may happen that an ordinary experience may suddenly appear quite extraordinary: we become aware of the phenomenal phenomenality of a phenomenon! (p. 31)

van Manen contended much, if not all phenomenology, has hermeneutic or interpretive elements, insisting “ultimately, phenomenology is less a determinate code of inquiry than the inceptual search for meaning of prereflective experience” (p. 27).
Meanwhile, the transcendental, also known as empirical, phenomenological tradition is less concerned with the interpretations of the researcher, and more focused on understanding and describing the experiences of those who interacted with the phenomenon being studied. Moustakas (1994) prioritized the “bracketing” of the researcher’s experiences, in order to set them aside as much as possible to allow for an unfiltered look at the phenomenon in question. He contended that this was critical to create the conditions, “in which everything is perceived freshly, as if for the first time” (p. 34). The procedural approach championed by Moustakas requires that after the researcher has bracketed their personal experiences and conceptions, they may begin collecting data in the form of interviews with several people who have experienced the phenomenon. Then the researcher practices phenomenological reduction by extracting the common themes that surface from the participants’ statements. Moustakas (1994) summarized the transcendental phenomenological approach as follows:

the empirical phenomenological approach involves a return to experience in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for a reflective structural analysis that portrays the essences of the experience…the aim is to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it. (p. 13)

Therefore, the outcome of a transcendental phenomenological study is a rich description of the essence of the experience participants had with the phenomenon under investigation.

**Phenomenology and the Principals’ Experience**

Phenomenology focuses on how individuals make meaning of experiences. As a result, personal interviews were the primary source of data in this inquiry of how principals and district leaders in small, single high school, school districts experience change in the superintendent
position. Creswell and Poth (2018) reported “a phenomenology provides a deep understanding of a phenomenon as experienced by several individuals” (p. 80). Additionally, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) offered, “a phenomenological approach is well suited to studying affective, emotional, and often intense human experiences” (p. 28). Considering the professional intimacy that can exist between building and district leaders in small school districts, exploring turnover in the highest leadership position in the district had the potential to uncover emotions or strong feelings. I have worked in both large and small school districts and had to be cognizant of my own experientially influenced biases. Several scholars (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lochmiller & Lester, 2017; Moustakas, 1994) explain, phenomenologists will often utilize a bracketing interview or practice, which is designed to identify and isolate the researchers own biases and judgements about the phenomena being studied, allowing the researcher to see the issues, themes, and the essence of the phenomenon as it emerges, more clearly.

I adopted the strategies described by phenomenological researchers. For example, I conducted the bracketing activity of journaling my reflections and reactions after each interview, while being mindful that “the procedures of qualitative research, or its methodology, are characterized as inductive, emerging, and shaped by the researcher’s experience in collecting and analyzing the data” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 21). I had to be attentive to my own reflexivity throughout this inquiry, while also accepting that as the researcher, I was also the primary research instrument. This required me to balance my own experiential knowledge with the phenomenological aim of seeking to understand how the participants experienced the phenomenon of superintendent turnover. Next, I provide a blueprint regarding how I conducted this study, including the protections afforded to the participants.
Institutional Review Board

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) application and review process is intended to protect the rights and welfare of human subjects involved in research activities sponsored by the University of St. Thomas. The IRB process ensures that all activities related to human subject research meet federal guidelines and ethical principles, as outlined by the Department of Health and Human Services, while providing safeguards for the respect and welfare of each research participant. I submitted a study application to the University of St. Thomas IRB through IRBnet.org, seeking approval for this inquiry, to ensure my methods and practices met ethical and regulatory standards, and it was approved (IRB packet #1195951-2; see Appendix A – D).

Human subjects deserve and require the highest levels of care, respect, and protections to prevent violations of their privacy and confidentiality. I provided each participant with a thorough informed consent form and put safeguards in place to ensure all information and interview data collected remained secure and private, such as saving it to a cloud storage location so that nothing was left on a personal device or physical storage drive. Additionally, I informed participants of any possible conflicts of interest, potential threats, or ethical considerations they needed be aware of. While each participant’s individual information was guarded by pseudonyms and codes, I also informed them they could opt out at any point throughout the study.

The participants of this study were principals and district leaders (directors and coordinators) in small, single high school, school districts who were experiencing turnover in their superintendent position, so I did not consider the participants represented in any vulnerable populations. As the principal researcher for this inquiry, I did not act as a coworker, supervisor, or subordinate of any of the individuals I interviewed to avoid any conflict of interest. In
addition, the influence of coercive positional power was further avoided since I did not function as a subordinate of any of the outgoing superintendents in this study. My study was intended to explore how the participants experience the phenomenon of superintendent turnover, therefore this study should not compromise their professional security or personal relationships. However, I have been a school administrator for the past 16 years and in public education in Minnesota for 26 years, so there was a possibility that I may have a previous relationship or association with some of the building or district leaders who are encountering the phenomenon of superintendent turnover during the timeframe of this study. Every effort was made to avoid selecting candidates for this study with whom I have a previous relationship, and I was successful in doing so with one exception. During my interview with Ivan we both realized we had participated in past professional development together, five years prior to the interview.

**Role of the Researcher**

I invested the first 13 years of my professional career as a classroom teacher, teacher leader, and administrator in a large urban school district, before transitioning to a small first ring suburban school district. Since leaving that large city school district, I spent the past 13 years as building principal in two small suburban school districts. As principal, I continue to see how the economies of scale influence differences in the climate, culture, and the organizational and professional infrastructures between large and small school districts. Moreover, I have observed shifts in district vision can dramatically impact educators, their focus, and practices in the smaller districts I have worked in. Meanwhile, similar, and even larger, shifts in vision and mission often had little to no impact on the practice of teachers and leaders in their buildings in the large urban district where I started my career.
Additionally, I have worked and interacted with educators from many school districts, in and outside of Minnesota, and observed that while the functions of a school district are roughly the same in all localities, the functioning and functionality of each district vary wildly. While I entered this with some preconceived notions and biases about how districts operate or ought to operate, I was acutely aware that those notions might not translate well to or be successfully imposed upon all school districts. In addition, I have only experienced public education through the lens of a white man. For example, while I had significant struggles engaging productively in school throughout middle school and high school, I am certain I avoided some of the labels and pitfalls that my peers of color, who had similar struggles, experienced. I interviewed professional peers, so I had to be aware of my biases and mental models about organizations and how they ought to function and operate, to ensure I did not shut down participants by introducing unsolicited judgements. Therefore, I focused on presenting a neutral stance as the researcher to limit my influence on the participants responses.

Max van Manen (2015) asserted that one of the challenges of phenomenological research is not that the researcher usually knows too little about the subject matter, but rather that they often know too much about the matter under investigation. This might cause one to be predisposed to a conclusion, prior to coming to grips with the lived experience of those who interacted with the phenomenon in question. Moustakas (1994) and van Manen (2014, 2015) both proposed using the technique of “bracketing,” that was previously introduced by Hussrl in 1970, to identify and contain the researcher’s personal beliefs, biases, assumptions, and presuppositions about the phenomenon. Therefore, I used bracketing practices to identify and corral my preconstructed ideas about how principals in small school districts experience change in the superintendency. Participating in a pre-interview as an interviewee, and journaling are
bracketing practices offered by the aforementioned scholars. I implemented both practices during this study and worked to be mindful of bracketing my existing biases and mental models throughout this study. While the phenomenologist cannot eliminate their own mental preconditions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), I worked to understand and be aware of mine, in order to conduct a more thorough inquiry into how others made meaning of and experience superintendent turnover.

Patton (2015) introduced a triangulated inquiry approach to reflexive questions, focused on exploring reflexive questions about a) self-reflexivity (i.e., what do I know?; how do I know what I know?; and what shapes and has shaped my perspectives?); b) reflexive questions about those studied—the participants (i.e., how do they know what they know?; and what shapes and has shaped their worldview?); and c) reflexivity about the audience (i.e., how do they make sense of what I give them?; and what do they bring to the findings I offer?; pp. 604-605). I used the triangulated inquiry approach when analyzing the data collected in this study to maintain an appropriate reflexive stance. In addition, I was mindful of these reflexive questions when conducting interviews to ensure I was attentive to my own reflexivity.

Recruitment of Participants

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explained, “to get at the essence or basic underlying structure of the meaning of an experience, the phenomenological interview is the primary method of data collection” (p. 27). A phenomenological study typically involves in-depth interviews with 5 to 25 participants who have experienced the phenomenon under inquiry (Creswell, 2018; Lochmiller, 2017). I utilized key informant sampling in this study. This sampling strategy focuses on gathering insights from individuals who are uniquely knowledgeable about an issue or phenomenon and willing to share their insights. Patton (2015) explained the rationale for this
sampling strategy, stating key informants “inform our inquiry when we tap into their knowledge, experience and expertise” (p.284).

The study was designed around securing 10-15 participants whose school districts were either facing a pending superintendent transition, were in the process of hiring a new superintendent, or had installed a new superintendent in the past year. In order to identify school districts and principals in these circumstances, I monitored superintendent position openings on a Midwestern Association of School Administrators online job posting site and contacted the executive director of a Midwestern Association of School Administrators for a list of school districts contending with superintendent turnover currently or had in the past year. Additionally, I also utilized my current superintendent as a resource for identifying prospective school districts from which to seek participants.

Through these sources, I identified 69 Minnesota school districts that installed a new superintendent in either the 2018-19 or 2019-20 school years, of which 66 school districts met the size criteria for this study (school districts which operate a single high school and serve less than 8750 students district-wide). I focused on school districts within a 100-mile radius of the midwestern metropolitan area, where I reside, then recruited prospective principal and district leader participants through an email introduction and invitation (see Appendix A). Some candidates required follow-up emails or phone conversations to secure their participation. All prospective participant contact information was gathered from their school, or school district public websites. I developed and maintained an excel spreadsheet with the candidate’s current role and school district, contact information, and dates and types of contact attempted or made with each prospective subject. Initially, 44 candidates, representing eight different school districts, were invited to participate in this study. According to a 2018 school district enrollment
report generated from Minnesota Department of Education website, these eight school districts ranged in size from 1029 students to 4568 students and were located in both suburban and rural communities (two suburban and six rural districts).

**Data Collection**

According to Moustakas (1994), a phenomenological interview consists of two primary open-ended questions and purposeful follow up questions. The first question focuses on the individual’s experience with the phenomenon, and the second seeks to understand the context in which they interacted with the phenomenon. I developed a structured questioning approach to gather participant reflections on each phase of the superintendent transition they were experiencing with this Moustakas’ model in mind.

In addition, I developed a series of potential follow-up questions to elicit additional reflections when appropriate within the context of each interview. I conducted the interviews in an agreed-upon location that was convenient and comfortable for the participant, while offering requisite levels of privacy and confidentiality.

Follow-up questions often organically arose during the interview and were asked to deepen my understanding of the essence of the experience for the participant. All participants were provided and signed an informed consent form (see Appendix B) prior to being interviewed, and each had the opportunity to decline to participate or discontinue participating at any point throughout the study. If requested, their data would have been removed from the study. If I had observed a participant experiencing emotional distress, I would have ended the interview and referred them to appropriate professional therapeutic services available either through the University of St. Thomas or in their local community.
Interview Location and Process

The interviews were conducted in an agreed-upon location that was convenient and comfortable for the participant, while offering requisite levels of privacy and confidentiality. The interview questions focused on the individual’s experience with the phenomenon of superintendent turnover and sought to understand the context in which they interacted with the phenomenon. Eight interviews were conducted in-person at agreed-upon locations, two were completed via telephone, and two were done via Zoom online/virtual meeting platform. Follow-up questions organically arose during the interview and were asked to deepen my understanding of the essence of the experience for the participant. The 12 interviews conducted in this inquiry ranged in length from 32 to 77 minutes, with an average length of 55 minutes, and an aggregate length of 11 hours of interview content.

Interviews were recorded on a digital recorder, then the digital file was uploaded to Rev.com, an online transcription service. The resulting transcripts were reviewed while listening to the audio recording to ensure the accuracy of transcriptions. The transcripts required minimal editing during this process. Next, both the audio files and the transcripts were uploaded/imported to Dedoose.com, an online, cloud-based coding and analysis resource/software, to assist in the process of distilling and coding the interview transcripts and data. Additionally, this added a layer of data protection and security since all resources were saved and processed in cloud-based environments to ensure they were not secured on a computer or digital storage device that could be lost or stolen.

Structured Questioning Approach

The interviews in this inquiry were conducted using the following structured questioning approach. Respondents were asked to reflect on the four phases of change or transition during
superintendent turnover that were established for this study by the researcher: Phase 1, the announcement of change (retirement, resignation, non-continuation); Phase 2, the search process; Phase 3, the appointment/announcement of new hire; and Phase 4, installation of new superintendent (this phase spans from the official start date for the new hire through the first year of their superintendency—if the respondent had experienced superintendent turnover the school year prior to their interview). After outlining each of the previous phases of transition during superintendency turnover, I asked the participants to respond to the following questions as they relate to each stakeholder group (a. Teachers/staff, b. Administration, c. Parents/community members):

1. How frequently did you find yourself in conversation or discussion with each stakeholder group about the superintendent transition during this phase?

2. What was the general sentiment of each stakeholder group during this phase of transition?

3. If you were to summarize your experiences during this phase in a word or phrase, what would that be?

I guided participants through questions one and two for each phase independently, one stakeholder group at a time. After reflecting on and responding to questions one and two relative to each stakeholder group, the participants were asked to summarize their experiences during that phase of transition in the superintendency in a word or phrase, prior to moving on to the next phase of transition.

While I used a structured approach to each interview, the interviews were conducted in an open-ended, free flowing manner that allowed respondents to guide the conversation as they reflected on the phenomenon of superintendent turnover within the context of their current role
and district. The participants’ responses were not constrained or interrupted, and they were encouraged to share as many of their reflections and thoughts as they were comfortable providing. I took notes and recorded affective information or body language cues during the interviews, while also observing the time of responses and overall length of the interview.

Prior to the start of the interview, and the digital recorder being turned on, I shared my professional background and current role as a high school principal to establish some commonality with the participants and set context for the study. In addition, before initiating the interview, I informed each participant that I had no professional or personal connections to the respondent’s outgoing or incoming superintendent to alleviate concerns over conflicts of interest or the possibility of a breach of confidentiality between the interviewer and the subject’s past or present supervisor. This was established to encourage candor and promote confidence in the process relative to what might be shared in the interview.

I provided and reviewed the informed consent form (see Appendix B) with each subject before asking them to sign two copies of the informed consent form. I also signed both copies of the informed consent form. Both the participant and I kept a signed copy for our independent records. After explaining the scope of the study and the steps that would be taken to protect their identity and information, each candidate was asked again to confirm their willingness and desire to participate in the study, prior to the formal start of the interview and the digital recorder being turned on.

**Overview of Participants and their School Districts**

As a result of the aforementioned recruitment, I conducted 12 interviews with participants from six different school districts, ranging in size from 1149 to 4568 students, serving two suburban and four rural communities. The school districts represented in this study
operate between two and five schools, have a range of three to eight school administrators, and the total number of administrative positions district-wide vary from 5 to 13 administrators. The school districts represented in this study had four men and two women outgoing superintendents who were replaced by three men and three women incoming superintendents. These school districts were run almost exclusively by white superintendents, both outgoing and incoming, with one exception—an incoming superintendent of color was hired by one school district. Each school district represented in this study experienced one to three superintendent transitions or turnovers in the past 10 years.

The participants in this inquiry represent the following subgroups: a) eight women and four men administrators, b) 10 building principals and two district level administrators, c) seven rural and five suburban administrators. The length of the participant’s careers in education ranged from 13 to 45 years, with an average career length of 24 years, representing 297 years of collective experience in education. The duration of the participant’s experience in administration varied from 4 to 27 years. Each respondent identified as white and had worked with at least four superintendents in their career, and none more than six.

**Pseudonyms**

Participants’ names and the name of the school district they work in were coded to protect their identity and that of the school district. Each participant was assigned an alphabetically ordered pseudonym, based on the order in which they were interviewed, to code the participants contributions to the study and data sets. The pseudonyms used for this study are: Adrianna, Blanca, Clara, Delfina, Estafania, Faustino, Geneva, Halina, Ivan, Juan, Klaus, Lucianna. In addition, the school districts represented in this study are identified based on the type of community they are located in and the order in which the related participant was
interviewed, as a result, the school districts in this study are identified as Suburban1, Rural2, Suburban3, Rural4, Rural5, Rural6. In order to avoid district identification by the reader, no specific district data is provided in this study, other than the district overview data included above. However, participant profiles are provided for the reader to have a sense of the scope of the participants’ backgrounds in education and educational leadership.

Participant Profiles

The following descriptions of each participant’s experiential background provides an overview of their professional experience and background. All participant names are pseudonyms, and the following information is summarized in Table 4.

Adrianna has worked in public education for 19 years at the middle school and high school level as a teacher, dean of students, assistant principal, and principal, serving both urban and suburban communities in the Midwest and Arizona. She has served in both large and small school districts, as defined in this study, and has nine years of experience as a school administrator. Adrianna currently serves as a principal and worked with five superintendents prior to this experience with the phenomenon of superintendent turnover a result of a voluntary separation (retirement) with the outgoing superintendent.

Blanca has supported the development of students and staff in public education for 45 years at the middle school and high school level as a teacher and district-level program coordinator. She has spent her entire career in the same small suburban school district. After 35 years in the classroom, she has served as a program coordinator for the past 10 years. Blanca worked with six superintendents prior to this experience with the phenomenon of superintendent turnover a result of a voluntary separation (retirement) with the outgoing superintendent.
Clara has served elementary, middle school, and high school students and staff during her 33 years in public education, as a chemical health specialist, teacher, assistant principal, and principal in rural Midwest communities. She has worked in both large and small school districts, as defined in this study, and has 21 years of experience as a school administrator. Clara currently serves as a principal and worked with six superintendents prior to this experience with the phenomenon of superintendent turnover a result of an involuntary separation with the outgoing superintendent.

Delfina has supported students and staff in public education for 26 years at the elementary, middle school, and high school level as a special education teacher, assistant principal, and principal in rural Midwest communities. She has experience in small school districts, as defined in this study, and has 14 years of experience as a school administrator. Delfina currently serves as a principal and worked with four superintendents prior to this experience with the phenomenon of superintendent turnover a result of an involuntary separation with the outgoing superintendent.

Estafania has worked in public education for 25 years at the high school level as a teacher, dean of students, assistant principal, and principal, serving both suburban and rural communities in the Midwest. She has served in both large and small school districts, as defined in this study, and has 15 years of experience as a school administrator. Estafania currently serves as a principal and worked with six superintendents prior to this experience with the phenomenon of superintendent turnover a result of a voluntary separation (retirement) with the outgoing superintendent.

Faustino has served in public education for 18 years at the middle school and high school levels as a teacher, assistant principal, and principal in both rural and suburban
communities in the Midwest. He has experience in small school districts, as defined in this study, and spent the last nine years as a school administrator. Faustino currently serves as a principal and worked with six superintendents prior to this experience with the phenomenon of superintendent turnover a result of a voluntary separation (retirement) with the outgoing superintendent.

**Geneva** has supported elementary, middle school, and high school learners and educators over her 26-year career in public education, as a teacher, coordinator, principal, and district-level director. She has worked in both large and small school districts, as well as in suburban and rural school communities. Geneva has 13 years of administrative experience, while currently serving as a district director and worked with five superintendents prior to this experience with the phenomenon of superintendent turnover a result of an involuntary separation with the outgoing superintendent.

**Halina** has worked in public education for 26 years at the elementary and middle school level as a special education teacher, assistant principal, and principal, serving urban, suburban, and rural communities in the Midwest. She has served in both large and small school districts, as defined in this study, and has 17 years of experience as a school administrator. Halina currently serves as a principal and worked with five superintendents prior to this experience with the phenomenon of superintendent turnover a result of a voluntary separation (retirement) with the outgoing superintendent.

**Ivan** has served in public education for 28 years at the middle school and high school level as a teacher, district technology director, assistant principal, and principal in both rural and suburban communities in two midwestern states. He has experience in small school districts, as defined in this study, and spent the last 14 years of as a school administrator. Ivan currently
serves as a principal and worked with five superintendents prior to this experience with the phenomenon of superintendent turnover a result of an involuntary separation with the outgoing superintendent.

**Juan** has worked in public education for 22 years at the elementary level as a teacher, building math specialist, dean of students, and principal, serving rural communities in two midwestern states. He has experience in small school districts, as defined in this study, and has been a school administrator for the past six years. Juan currently serves as a principal and worked with five superintendents prior to this experience with the phenomenon of superintendent turnover a result of an involuntary separation with the outgoing superintendent.

**Klaus** has supported the development of middle school and high school learners and educators over his 13-year career in public education, as a teacher, assistant principal, and principal. He has worked in small, rural Midwest school districts and has four years of experience as a school administrator. Klaus currently serves as a principal and worked with four superintendents prior to this experience with the phenomenon of superintendent turnover a result of a voluntary separation (retirement) with the outgoing superintendent.

**Lucianna** has served in public education for 17 years at the elementary, middle school, and high school level as a teacher, assistant principal, and principal in both rural and suburban communities in the Midwest. She has experience in both large and small school districts, as defined in this study, and spent the last five years as a school administrator. Lucianna currently serves as a principal and worked with four superintendents prior to this experience with the phenomenon of superintendent turnover a result of an involuntary separation with the outgoing superintendent.
Table 3

Overview of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Order</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Current Position</th>
<th>School Community Type</th>
<th>Years of Experience in Education</th>
<th>Experience in Administration (in years)</th>
<th># of Superintendents worked with</th>
<th>Exp in Large School District</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Adriana</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Blanca</td>
<td>Program Coordinator</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Clara</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Delfina</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Estafania</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Faustino</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Geneva</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Halina</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Ivan</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Juan</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6(13w/DOS)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Klaus</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Lucianna</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Analysis

According to Merriam (2016), the product of a phenomenological study is a composite description of the essence of a phenomenon. I followed the data analysis process outlined by Creswell (2018) and built from the work of previous scholars (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2014). After conducting bracketing activities to identify and contain my personal biases and experiences, I reviewed the volumes of interview transcripts to identify a list of significant statements. Next, I grouped or clustered these statements into themes. I then, reviewed the interview notes and summaries I wrote at the close of each interview for other information I
recorded at the time of the interviews that reinforced or explained the summary statements and themes. These steps were combined to capture the context and situational factors that influenced how the participants experienced the phenomenon.

I used Dedoose, an online coding resource, to assist in the process of distilling and coding the interview transcripts and data. This tool increased the efficiency of analysis, considering the volume of interview data that was generated, while maintaining the integrity of the process and conclusions. In addition to utilizing the tools available through Dedoose.com, I used Microsoft Excel to build tables with participant summary statements for each phase of superintendent transition, to allow for the visualization and analysis of the themes that emerged. An extensive Excel document was generated by this approach, yielding multiple tabs and tables for each element of the structured questioning approach developed for this study. Then I culled the themes from the interview data for analysis.

After analyzing the data, I adopted three major theories to interpret my findings. These theories or framework explained the content review of literature in Chapter Two and also applied to the themes derived from data analysis. I applied William Bridges’ (2016) Bridges Transition Model, Bolman and Deal’s (2017) Four-Frame Model and Forsyth et al.’s (2011) Collective Trust Model to the themes and composite description to seek a deeper understanding of how principals and district leaders in small school districts experienced change in the superintendency

**Reliability**

Merraim (2016) argued that, “All research is concerned with producing valid and reliable knowledge in an ethical manner. Being able to trust research results is especially important” (p. 237). On the other hand, Moustakas (1994) offered, “perception is regarded as the primary sources of knowledge” and is a source “that cannot be doubted” (p. 52). While these perspectives
may not be opposing, they reveal the challenges of reliability and validity in qualitative research. Merriam (2016) asserted renaming the concepts may be appropriate to broaden our understanding and offers credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as key concepts to consider when seeking reliability in qualitative research.

While phenomenological studies are not testing a hypothesis, the data must be reliable enough to accurately represent the experiences under examination. Despite the complexity of this challenge, there are safeguards that can be employed to support the reliability of a study. Therefore, I prepared the primary questions in advance and used them with each participant. Additionally, each interview was audio recorded and I used Rev.com transcription services to ensure accuracy. I then reviewed each transcript while listening to the audio file simultaneously. During this activity, I listened for accuracy of transcription and, as Creswell (2018) recommended, for any indications that the participants were influenced by the behavior of the investigator or by leading questions. Creswell (2018) and Lochmiller (2017) encouraged the use of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software to support reliability. I harnessed the power of Dedoose in the coding of the interview transcripts and to assist my search for themes in the interview data.

Creswell (2018) also recommended that researchers seek the clarification and articulation of their own bias. This aligns with the bracketing technique presented by Moustakas (1994) and van Manen (2014). As the researcher in this phenomenological study, I interviewed as a participant using the questions I developed, then analyzed my interview similarly to uncover and contain, or bracket, my presuppositions and biases relative to how principals in small districts experience change in the superintendent position. An additional bracketing practice I employed is reflective journaling after interviews. Reflective journaling allowed me to review my own
experiences as a researcher and inspect for the intrusion of my own biases into this study. I incorporated each of these practices to protect the reliability and validity of this inquiry.

**Member Checking**

Member checking “involves taking data, analysis, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so that they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 261). According to Bazeley (2013), member checking is an important validity tool for checking the accuracy of descriptive information. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explained, “participants should be able to recognize their experience in your interpretation or suggest some fine-tuning to better capture their perspectives” (p. 246). To support the reliability of the data collected in this study and ensure the participants’ experiences and perspectives were accurately captured and summarized, I emailed each participant a series of tables summarizing their responses to the structured questioning approach, prior to analyzing the data. Each participant was asked to review the following summary data: a) the frequency of dialogue with stakeholder groups (staff, administration, community) relative to the superintendent turnover during each phase of transition, b) stakeholder group generalized sentiment during each phase of transition, and c) the word or phrase that best describes their experiences during each phase of transition. These data sets were broken down or represented in the tables accordingly by phase of transition (Phase 1: the announcement of change (retirement, resignation, non-continuation), Phase 2: the search process, Phase 3: the appointment/announcement of new hire, and Phase 4: installation of new superintendent). Through persistent emails and phone calls, I was able to secure confirmation from 10 of the 12 participants that the summarized data accurately reflected their experiences and perspectives during their most recent experience with the phenomenon of superintendent turnover.
Ethical Considerations

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) contended, “a phenomenological approach is well suited to studying affective, emotional, and often intense human experiences” (p. 28). While this assertion may be accurate, it also serves as a reminder that exploring the lived experience of others can be an intrusive experience that reveals vulnerability to both researcher and the participant. Therefore, it was critical that I put safeguards in place to protect the dignity, welfare, and personal and professional standing of each participant.

Exploring the personal and professional lives of participants, while seeking an in-depth understanding of the essence of an experience, can raise several possible ethical issues. For this reason, the United States has federal regulations designed to protect individuals who participate in human research. As a result, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was created to ensure that the rights and dignity of participants in human subject studies are protected and preserved. In order to understand the complexities and concerns of human subjects’ research, I completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI; see Appendix D). The CITI Modules covered the history of and necessity for ethical research to protect human subjects. It also clarified the guidelines for informed consent, assessing risk, and ensuring privacy and confidentiality. Additionally, the training explored potential conflicts of interest for the researcher, which were useful as I considered and developed this study.

Next, I present the interview data and findings that emerged from the interviews conducted in this study. The subsequent chapter will walk through how the participants in this study experienced each phase of superintendent transition during their recent experience with the phenomenon of superintendent turnover.
CHAPTER FOUR: THE IMPACT RADIUS OF SUPERINTENDENT SEPARATION

The purpose of this study was to explore how principals and district leaders in small, single high school, school districts experience change or turnover in the superintendent position. Moreover, this study examined superintendent and principal relationships during periods of transition, including departure of the residing superintendent and installation of the successor. Ultimately, this study assessed the perceived effects of superintendent transition on principals as they navigate the inevitable organizational change caused by superintendent turnover in small school districts. I adopted a phenomenological interview approach, which recognizes the researcher as an instrument of the research. This allowed for the participants’ experiences to flow organically from the interview, and the questions to be less scripted and more responsive to the flow of the conversation during the interview.

I developed 15 prepared questions (see Appendix C) and designed a separate structured questioning approach intended to explore the principal and district leader experience with the phenomenon of superintendent turnover. The interviews were conducted using this structured questioning approach, while the prepared questions were utilized as follow up questions or to elicit reflections from the respondents when appropriate and fitting within the unique context of each interview. The structured questioning approach designed for this study asked participants to reflect on their interactions and experiences with three discreet stakeholder groups, relative to three separate elements of the structured questioning approach, during each of the four phases of superintendent transition that were established for this study. As a result, this chapter is data rich and explores multiple data sets, as I walk through the principal experience during each of the phases of superintendent transition – announcement, search, appointment, and installation. I
begin with Phase One which concerns the announcement and responses to the departure of the superintendent.

**Phase One: Announcement**

The story of any superintendent turnover begins with a public announcement of the pending separation of the outgoing superintendent as a result of retirement, resignation, non-continuation of their contract or termination. This public notification also ushers in the announcement phase of superintendent transition, which concludes when the school board formerly initiates the search process to find the next superintendent. The following section will explore the themes that emerged from the participants experiences during the announcement phase.

During the interviews, participants were asked to reflect on the frequency of dialogue and the sentiments of those conversations with district administrators, teachers/staff, and parents or community member stakeholder groups relative to the announcement of change in their district’s superintendency. In addition, participants were asked to summarize their experiences during the announcement phase in a word or phrase. The themes identified in Phase One included: (1) trust; (2) mixed emotions; (3) readiness for change; (4) concerns for continuity; and (5) a sentimental divide. Participants described the level of trust they had with the former district leader and how their mixed emotions created uneasy feelings between and among the superintendent, district principals, district administrators, faculty, and other stakeholders. I begin with the theme of trust because the influence of trust being present or absent with the outgoing superintendent will be considered in the subsequent themes, as I explore how participants experienced the phenomenon of superintendent turnover.
Trust

Through the course of the interviews, each participant disclosed or referenced the level of personal or professional trust they and/or their peers had with the outgoing superintendent, as they reflected on the announcement phase. Six respondents reported high levels of trust existed with the outgoing superintendent, and six participants described either personal or systemic distrust with the outgoing superintendent. This section begins with the respondents who described their relationship with the outgoing district leader was characterized by trust.

Estefania described her outgoing superintendent as a mentor: “She was a mentor for me …. I wanted to work for her and learn from her …. Having female mentors in secondary education is really important for me as it's more of a male dominated role at the secondary level.”

A member of the Suburban1 school district as well, Adrianna also described a trusting mentor relationship with her former superintendent:

I think I have a really strong relationship with her, both personally and professionally. I think she's been really instrumental in my moves, from a dean of students to an assistant principal, to a principal …. [The superintendent served] as a mentor for me [and encouraged me] … And then, personally, we have a pretty strong connection. I feel like she is someone I can go to. I can bounce ideas off of. I really feel strongly that she cares deeply about my success, and she'll do whatever she can to make sure that I don't fail.

Halina described her relationship with her former boss with, “we still communicate with each other, it was a very good relationship as far as professional relationship, we had a good professional relationship.” Blanca offered another perspective on the connection her outgoing superintendent had with administrative colleagues:
Another coordinator lost a husband from cancer. She was there at the hospital, bringing her pajamas, bringing her food, supporting her. I feel like in a small district like this, we're able to do not only the academic educational kind of work we have, but we're able to sustain the personal relationships and connections. I felt connected personally, and also supported in my role professionally.

Faustino and Klaus were hired as principals in their school districts respectively after the announcement phase but prior to the installation of the new superintendents. While neither was employed in their current districts during the announcement phase, they shared their understandings of the climate of trust the previous district leader had nurtured. Faustino, who was a parent/community member of the Suburban3 school district prior to being hired there, reported that the former superintendent was considered a solid organizational leader who had, “successfully led a construction levy and project and it sounded like he was ready to step away, on that note. There was no drama circulating in the community about his leadership”. Faustino also stated that since he joined the staff of Suburban3 he has heard, “the former superintendent was generally respected as an organizational leader, and people knew what to expect under him”. Meanwhile, Klaus shared he felt pressure coming in following the retirements of both the superintendent and high school principal. “This community had that leadership structure in place for like 30 years, and people loved them. This is a very tight knit community with many staff who grew up here, went to college and returned to work and live here”. Klaus described a culture of trust and appreciation with the outgoing superintendent and his leadership team.

Conversely, half of the participants in this study described their relationship with the outgoing superintendent as imbued with distrust. In these cases, the participants described systemic distrust as a byproduct of the former superintendent’s leadership. From this side of the
trust continuum, Clara provided an overview of the climate of distrust under her outgoing superintendent:

I think we’ve been going through a change over the past several years. Under this current Superintendent, trust has declined in this district as a whole. … I think people just really want to return to more of a collaborative, trusting environment. … the term protectionism, I think that there's been too much of that because of the kind of climate of suspicion and distrust and the more self-serving nature of the current Superintendent, kind of resume building … I think that people are going to be glad to see some of that go away. It's been so dysfunctional and too many behind scenes deals and behind closed doors decisions that were made that are going to take a lot of time to recover from.

Ivan also shared concerns about distrust with his outgoing superintendent, “with the previous superintendent. I wanted to trust what she said, but I always felt like I had to verify it to make sure that it was accurate or true.” Similarly, Lucianna described the effects of “broken trust:”

We're a broken district when it comes to administration and teachers in regard to trust. Being on an admin team where, there was that level of trust there, but there wasn't that level of trust with our superintendent … So that trust piece was pretty intense … a lot of that goes with honesty. When you lack that, you almost start saying things that you even start to believe yourself, like this is what we were dealing with.

Juan saw a shift in the level of support he and his colleagues received from their former superintendent in the last couple of years of his superintendency. “I mean we were running into walls because we weren't getting the support and certain things that we wanted done towards the end…it got to the point where you went to cabinet at that point instead of the superintendent.”
This led to an erosion of trust with administrators in his school district. Geneva was one of the cabinet members Juan referenced and shared a similar sentiment about the outgoing superintendent, stating:

He was like an absentee leader for the last year and half, and a lot fell to me and to the Special Ed Director. We carried the brunt of that, so that became really difficult. It actually became easier when he then did take a leave, because then we didn't have to work around him.

Similarly, Delfina described the previous Rural2 district leader with, “he was not a very collaborative leader and did not seek our input on much of anything. He would just announce decisions as if we had been involved in the decision. As result, there was not much trust with him”.

As stated previously, in this study there was an equal distribution of participants who reported the relationship they and others in their school system had with the outgoing superintendent was characterized by either trust or distrust. There was also an equal distribution of districts represented on each side of this characterization. As a result, six participants from three different school districts represent a trust subgroup and the same number are represented in a distrust subgroup. Table 5 provides a visual representation of each subgroup.
Next, I explore the theme of mixed emotions because the “Announcement” and departure meant different things to different people.

**Mixed Emotions**

The theme that emerged most clearly from the interviews during announcement phase was mixed emotions. This theme was present in participant’s descriptions of stakeholder sentiments and some of the word or phrase summations provided by respondents to describe the announcement phase experience. Mixed emotions or feelings was stated directly or expressed by eight of the ten respondents, who were in their positions/districts during this phase, when discussing the sentiments they or other stakeholders experienced as result of the announcement of superintendent turnover: Adrianna, Blanca, Estafania, Geneva, Halina Ivan, Juan, and Lucianna. In addition, Adrianna, Blanca, Estafania and Juan provided word or phrase summaries of their experiences during the announcement phase that reflected mixed emotions. This sentiment was reportedly shared by multiple stakeholder groups and the theme is summarized in this section.
Adrianna reflected on the departure of her former superintendent with, “mixed emotions, glad for her, she was very well respected and appreciated and built some strong structures and cultural elements—which I wondered, will those survive, and will I have the same trusting supportive relationship with the next superintendent?” Adrianna expressed she was excited by the opportunity to continue to grow personally and professionally alongside a new district leader, but also wondered, “can I be vulnerable with the next superintendent?” Additionally, Adriana’s word or phrase summary of her announcement phase experience was, “bittersweet, fear of the unknown.”

Halina also stated she had “mixed feelings, but not surprised. We worked really well together, but I know he felt he accomplished what he set out to do.” Estafania expressed having a strong personal and professional relationship with her outgoing superintendent and being excited for her, as she moved into retirement, but wondered, “will the new superintendent understand, respect, and continue our initiatives and continue what is working? Will there be the same level of trust with the new superintendent?” Estafania announcement phase summary phrase of “concern and curiosity” also reflected the theme of mixed emotions. Lucianna explained, during the announcement phase the administration experienced “relief, like a weight being lifted, then anxiety about what may come next.” Similarly, while Ivan reported, “everyone was ready for change” he also experienced uncertainty and tension:

When you work with a superintendent for eight years, you don't have to really second guess or you don't have to guess about anything, you know them and you know how they're going to react to situations, and you may know what decision they're going to make before they even make it. So, for me, it was, I've been working with this person for
eight years and I'm going to have somebody new come in and maybe try to micromanage me and the administrative team."

In her district level directorship, Geneva supported the Rural4 principals and summarized what several of these building leaders were processing with:

There was a fear of ‘what am I going to lose when a new superintendent comes in? and what am I going to gain?’ My peers wondered ‘what kind of supports am I going to gain that I don't have right now? But what kind of autonomy am I going to lose?'

From another Rural4 organizational vantage point, Juan shared that, “people were sad to see him (outgoing superintendent) go, but excited to have someone new come in that could maybe make some changes that they were looking for. Opportunities for growth …” Juan also summarized the announcement phase with “excitement and empathy, personally.” Blanca, summarized her announcement phase experience with “mixed emotions” and reported being excited for the outgoing superintendent, but “nervous about what will be changed, and wondering will I and our programming be supported? but also excited for some change?” The most common theme among the participant reflections during the first phase of their superintendent transition was mixed emotions.

Some participants characterized organizational culture under their former superintendent with a climate of trust while others described systemic distrust with the outgoing superintendent. The sentiments within this theme can be generalized as a tension between joy or satisfaction and a fear of the unknown. Regardless of whether or not participants were in favor of a separation with the outgoing superintendent, they consistently wrestled with the uncertainty of what would come next. Respondents who reported strong personal and professional relationships with the
outgoing superintendent and being excited or glad for their district leader as they headed into retirement, also consistently shared concerns about the ambiguity of what to expect in their individual and collective relationships with the new or incoming superintendent. Meanwhile, participants who described systemic dysfunction under the previous district leader, expressed they understood how to navigate that organizational culture, but were uncertain of what to expect with the next superintendent. The theme of mixed emotions was the most commonly referenced by the participants of this study and provides some insights into how principals and other stakeholders initially experienced superintendent turnover.

**Readiness for Change**

The sentiment of readiness for change was not confined to participants who fell into the distrust subgroup mentioned previously. This sentiment was expressed by participants with strong professional and personal relationships with their outgoing superintendent and by those who were ready to see their former superintendent go. In this section, I discuss this theme first through the lens of those who reported systemic distrust with their former district leader, then explore this theme through the sentiments of the administrators who had strong personal or professional relationships with their outgoing superintendents.

Several respondents shared strong feelings about the level of change readiness from their organizational perspective. This group of participants (Clara, Delfina, Geneva, Juan, Ivan, and Lucianna) expressed a readiness for change based on systemic distrust or missed opportunities under the outgoing superintendent. For example, Clara paraphrased the staff sentiment in her school district with, “It is time for change, he seemed checked out … and people just really want to return to a more collaborative and trusting environment.” Clara, also summarized the announcement phase with the phrase “I wish it had happened sooner.” Delfina also reported
similar sentiment when discussing the level of systemic trust under the former superintendent. She described the climate of trust with, “There was diminished trust and communication, and several things that were questionably handled, so many people were ready for a change.” Relatedly, Delfina’s word or phrase summary of the announcement phase was, “we were ready for change, excited for change.”

Ivan described the change readiness in his district with, “in general we were ready for some change. I think that there were a few issues that needed to be addressed and I think people were kind of looking forward to those things being different than they were.” Lucianna added, “I think because we were broken as a staff when it comes to trust, I think it was more excitement, an attitude of let's get this over so that we can move on and see what we can find.” This sentiment was reflected in Lucianna’s summary phrase for the announcement phase, which she paraphrased with “relieved, then OK let’s do this.”

Juan described the overall readiness for change in his school district. “I think people were excited. I think there were things that weren't happening that people wanted to see happen. And there was just a general overall buzz with regards to that.” Geneva, a Rural4 district director recalled having conversation with principal colleagues and district administrators where, “I'd have to remind them, remember we're not always functioning the right way here. Maybe somebody coming in would be good for us. We do need to make some changes, so this is probably going to be a good thing.” Geneva also reflected a readiness change in her condensed summary phrase of the announcement phase with, “frozen and forced to simply maintain the status quo.”

Three of the participants who had a strong, trusting relationships with their outgoing superintendent also conveyed a level readiness for change. Adrianna reported having strong
personal and professional relationships with her outgoing superintendent yet also expressed some excitement for change, and perceived opportunities to continue to grow individually and as an organization as a result of the turnover. She explained, “even though things were going really well, I am excited by the possibility of change and excited that we have an opportunity to continue to grow and improve as a district under another leader with fresh ideas and perspectives.” Similarly, Blanca echoed an excitement to grow with a new leader, despite having a very close personal relationship with the former superintendent. She shared, “I feel like we have done some really good things as a district, but I am excited to see what a new leader will bring, and how we can continue to grow with new perspectives from the superintendent’s office.” Halina who maintained a relationship with her former superintendent after his separation, reported she was also looking forward to the opportunity to continue to grow with her colleagues under a new superintendent. She offered, “I think we generally felt supported by him, but we also had a lot of autonomy and did not work or learn together as an administrative team very much. I am excited by that possibility under new leadership.”

The theme of readiness for change was not confined to school districts or respondents who reported a lack of trust or an involuntary separation with the outgoing superintendent, and it was the second most common theme within the reported stakeholder sentiments during the initial phase of superintendent transition. Respondents who lacked trust with their former superintendent were eager for change as a means of moving on from the past district leader. Participants with trusting personal and professional relationships with their outgoing district leader generally saw change as an opportunity to continue to grow alongside another leader. In spite of the mixed emotions shared by most respondents during the announcement phase, there was also a sense of readiness for change, and a sense of optimism toward the possibility of
continued to professional and organizational growth and improvement. The next section will explore the theme of concerns for continuity.

**Concerns for Continuity**

In addition to, and seemingly in conflict with, the stakeholder sentiment of readiness for change was a theme of concerns for continuity during the announcement phase of superintendent transition. The expression of concerns for continuity was a theme that appeared in the reflections on stakeholder sentiments by seven participants (Adrianna, Blanca, Estafania, Geneva, Ivan, Juan and Lucianna). Interestingly, each of these participants had also expressed a readiness for change. Blanca, for example, expressed openness to change, but also concern about the district-wide program she coordinates possibly being changed or abandoned all together by a new superintendent. “I am excited to see what ideas a new superintendent will bring, but also worry the district commitment to the program I coordinate could change. I have seen other districts choose to go a different direction after a superintendent change.” Similarly, Adrianna shared, “there’s been some level of concern about what a new superintendent will bring, what changes will they have. Are they going to disrupt a lot of the things that are the foundation Suburban1 has been built on?” This concern was also present in Estafania’s reflections as she wondered, “will the new superintendent understand, respect and continue our initiatives and what is working?”

In addition to concerns for programmatic continuity the administrators in Suburban1 also expressed interpersonal concerns for continuity. Adrianna wondered if she could be as vulnerable with a new district leader as she was with her former superintendent. She felt she could call her former leader and say, “Hey, I'm struggling with this. What are your thoughts?” Without the fear of judgment, or her looking down on me.” She also wondered, “how long will it take for that level of trust to develop with someone else in that role?” Blanca also shared
concerns that she may not have the same trusting relationship with the next district leader, stating, “I have been blessed to work with and for someone who I know truly cares about me as a person and professional, and I am aware that is not a guarantee with the next superintendent.” Meanwhile, Estatania wondered if the level of trust and partnership the administrative team had under the former leader would continue under a new leader. “We were in a really good place as an admin. team relative to trust and functionality. I hope that will be the case with a new superintendent, but we will have to wait and see.”

Four participants shared that they or their peers wondered if their own autonomy or ability to do what they think is right for their building, staff and students would continue under new leadership. Geneva expressed that her peers in Rural4 were concerned that their autonomy as a leader may be impacted by this change, sharing, “you could run your schools, your programs how you saw fit. And everybody liked that to some extent, and also knew there was a very small chance that a new superintendent was going to follow in that path.” Juan echoed this with, “I am not trying to sound arrogant, but I think I run my building fairly well, and I hope I am allowed and trusted to do that with the next superintendent.” Ivan shared a similar perspective about maintaining some professional autonomy in the Rural5 school district, stating “the most important thing for me in this change was that I wasn't going to have a superintendent who was going to micromanage the high school and the management of the high school.” Lucianna shared a similar sentiment during the announcement phase, expressing “I felt like all I can really do is continue to focus on what I think is best for the elementary and hope that my new superintendent will be behind me on this?” These administrators had concerns about their own autonomy and ability to continue to do what is working in their buildings and with their staff, students and
families, wondering if the new superintendent would interrupt what they have worked to build in their schools.

The concerns for continuity reported by participants varied in their focus from programmatic (district wide initiatives and focus or vision) to professional/interpersonal (continuation of a collaborative culture, trust, and the ability to be vulnerable with a new district leader, like they had been with the previous) to pragmatic (principal autonomy and control of the work in their buildings). Interestingly, intertwined with sentiments of mixed emotions and a readiness for change was the theme of concerns for continuity. While a readiness for change and concerns for continuity may be seemingly incongruent sentiments, they are an example of the mixed emotions the participants in this study reported they and other stakeholders had during the first phase of superintendent transition. Next, I will explore the announcement phase theme of a sentimental divide.

A Sentimental Divide

As previously identified, the participants from three of the six school districts represented in this study described their relationship or the relationship of other stakeholders with the outgoing superintendent as characterized by distrust. This group of participants were previously identified as the distrust subgroup in this study, and they also reflect the participants who reported their former superintendent had involuntarily separated from their school district. Delfina, Clara, Juan, and Lucianna provide examples of reported involuntary separation between the outgoing superintendent and their school districts. For instance, Delfina stated, “I don't think this retirement announcement was something that he was planning on, I think he felt that he needed to do it. So, I think that he just kind of was done.” Juan offered the following
perspectives about the circumstances surrounding the separation of his districts outgoing superintendent:

I think in actuality people were excited for the opportunity to have a new superintendent come in. … I think there were things that weren't happening that people wanted to see happen. And there was just a general overall buzz with regards to that … So, I think a lot of it was trying to get a bond to go through and it didn't the couple times. It was just wearing, wearing, wearing to the point where, I think he just kind of got beat up enough where he was done.

The participants insights on the reasons for separation sometimes differed from the school district’s public presentation of the separation. Clara shared her reflections on the factors influencing the superintendent transition in her school district. She articulated a difference between internal sentiment within the school board and their external messaging about the superintendent turnover:

I think that they're glad he's moving on overall, the school board I think their actions have influenced his choice to move on, at the same time, publicly they're not painting any picture that it's due to poor performance. They're painting a picture that they're grateful for his contributions and … We also just recently hired a new business director, and just some things that he is indicating in terms of the budget, there's some budgetary concerns that our leadership team was not previously aware of.

Lucianna’s reflections also represent a disconnection between what was going on behind the scenes, internally, and what was being portrayed externally to the community and staff:
So yeah, it was kind of pushed upon her. ... but all the community knew is, for the most part, it was on her own. Then some community members started putting puzzle pieces together, and then realized maybe it wasn't on her own terms, I guess ... one time she had kind of walked up to (the high school principal) and I after she had made the announcement in front of staff and had told the staff that she was leaving. She walked up to us and said, I hope I'm making the right decision ... Keep in mind, this is two months after she had told us she was being nonrenewed. We looked at each other and we were like, what do you mean that you're making the best decision? I don't think there's a decision to be made right now.

According to the participants in the distrust subgroup in this study there was a sentimental divide within their communities relative to the outgoing superintendent. None of these exiting leaders were universally appreciated or disliked, rather there was diversity of thought about the efficacy of the outgoing superintendent among stakeholders. Ivan felt the community and teachers in Rural5 were split on the outgoing superintendent, asserting “no one was really in the middle, either you loved her or would love to see her go.” Lucianna echoed this sentiment, sharing, “there was a 50/50 split, half sadness and half celebrating” during the announcement phase.

Similarly, Geneva offered, “many were surprised except those of us who worked close with him ... we were frustrated.” While the administration and some staff in Rural4 School District felt ready for change, the community perspective, according to Geneva, was, “wow didn’t see that coming” and “why is this happening to us?” Juan reported that the former Rural4 superintendent “had grown up in and was a product of this community, and then returned to be the superintendent, so many community members held him in high regard. But the staff and
school board were not as appreciative.” Clara shared that while the outgoing superintendent in Rural2 had some community members and staff who supported him, the feeling was not shared by the administrative team or many staff. She provided the following example of this sentimental divide:

He was never present in the schools or at school events, but he never missed church on Sundays. So, some community members felt like he was visible and accessible, but I, nor most of my staff shared that perspective. In fact, we often thought it would be nice if he made an appearance at this or that event, knowing that it would go a long way with staff and families.

The theme of sentimental divide did not emerge during the interviews with participants in the trust subgroup. While no leader is universally appreciated, the participants in the trust subgroups did not report similar divisions within stakeholder sentiment. The sentimental divide that was reportedly present in the communities of Rural2, Rural4, Rural5 reflect a dichotomy of public sentiment relative to the leadership and job performance of their outgoing superintendents and may have also contributed to the involuntary separation of the former district leader. Next, I provide summary of the announcement phase themes.

**Phase One Themes Summarized**

The themes that emerged from the reported stakeholder sentiment during the announcement phase of superintendent transition were trust, mixed emotions, readiness for change, concerns for continuity, and a sentimental divide. The first three themes were well represented in the reflections on the first phase of transition across the participant pool. However, the theme of a sentimental divide was consistently found in the cogitations of the respondents categorized in the distrust subgroup but absent from the sentiments shared by the
participants in the trust subgroup. During the interviews each participant conveyed the level of personal and systemic trust that existed with the outgoing superintendent. As a result, the theme of trust resulted in the identification of a trust subgroup and a distrust subgroup within this study. In addition, the theme of trust resurfaced in other themes throughout this inquiry.

Participants experienced mixed emotions about the separation of the outgoing superintendent regardless of the level of trust they had with that leader. Participants consistently described their mixed emotions as ranging from excitement to uncertainty or a fear of the unknown. These conflicting emotions were commonly reported and reflect the tension felt by the administrators and the other stakeholders during superintendent turnover. In fact, the theme of mixed emotions is reflected in the next two themes when they are considered collectively rather than in isolation.

The sentimental themes of readiness for change and concerns for continuity appear to be conflicting sentiments, until viewed through the lens of mixed emotions. Then these themes represent two separate sets of mixed emotions that tug in curious ways at stakeholders during the first phase of superintendent transition. Interest or a readiness for change aligned with sentiments of excitement and openness to explore new possibilities, while the concern for continuity reflects an apprehension or fear that what the participants and district stakeholders most appreciate about their district could be a casualty of the change, they are curious and open to. The theme of mixed emotions can be seen as the umbrella theme that the other announcement phase themes fit under. In fact, the final theme of a sentimental divide, represents the broader mixed emotions represented in communities where the organizational culture was characterized with distrust and the superintendent was reportedly involuntarily separated from the school district. Respondents from these districts, which comprised the distrust subgroup, reported their communities fairly
evenly split between sadness and celebration over the separation of the outgoing superintendent. This reported mix of emotions at the broader community level reflects that mixed emotions is both a discreet theme of the stakeholder sentiment during the first phase of superintendent transition and a summary of the sentimental themes for the announcement phase of superintendent turnover. The announcement phase of superintendent transition is followed by the search phase. The next section presents the themes that emerged from search phase of superintendent transition.

**Phase Two: The Search**

Phase two of superintendent transition begins when a school board formally initiates their search for a new superintendent. During this time staff and community members learned about prospective candidates, as the school board announced the interview process and timeline. This phase continued throughout the search/interview process and concluded with the appointment of the next superintendent. The themes from the search phase included: (1) the search process; (2) informal vetting; and (3) desired attributes. I review each of the phase two themes in the subsequent sections, starting with the search process, and then provide a summary of the search phase themes at the close of this section.

**The Search Process**

A theme described during the announcement phase involved readiness for change. While some participants experienced excitement and readiness for change during phase one, there were only two references to excitement during the search phase. When asked to summarize the search phase in a word or phrase, Juan’s condensed his experience to “staff were excitedly apprehensive, and administration was excited and curious.” Blanca reported having “some excitement to see who is interested in joining us and working alongside our administrative
team.” However, she also offered “curious and anxious” as her summation of the search phase experience. Both respondents connected search phase excitement with curiosity and either apprehension or anxiousness. The remaining participants reported experiences that more aligned with apprehension and anxiousness during the search phase.

Seven of the ten participants who were in their positions during the search phase of transition expressed frustration with the search process (Adrianna, Blanca, Clara, Delfina, Estafania, Geneva, and Lucianna). Some felt the lack of administrative involvement in the process was frustrating, others had concerns about the level of involvement the outgoing superintendent had or was perceived to have in the selection process, and finally one participant had deep frustration with how negotiations were handled with their district’s top candidate which resulted in the appointment of another candidate. In this study, participants from five of the six districts represented reported their school boards hired a search firm to support and guide the search and selection process. However, frustrations with the hiring process was reported by participants regardless of whether their district employed a search firm in their selection process.

Adrianna, Blanca, and Estafania’s school board was the only one to manage the search and selection process without the support of a search firm. They said the search and interview process in their district was not very inclusive and did not feel transparent. Blanca described the problem as a failure to communicate: “There was not much communication about the interviews or throughout the process, which was disappointing since we wanted to know about these candidates that were interested in coming here.” Estafania recalled only one opportunity to meet the candidates prior to the appointment announcement made by the school board. Adrianna echoed these sentiments while also questioning the school boards perceived commitment to the process:
We didn't hear much about it until it was like, ‘Interviews will be next Tuesday. You're invited to sit in the back of the room if you want to come.’ There wasn't a ton of transparency about the process, about how they selected the candidates … Stakeholders were allowed to be present during the interviews, but not on interview panels. And then even at the interview, the day of the interview there were school board members that were not present. And so we also felt that that was odd because this is one of their biggest jobs to hire a superintendent. And they weren't even all present in the interviews.

Participants with a strong professional and personal relationship with the exiting superintendent were interested in the selection process, and eager to learn about the candidates who might replace their esteemed retiring colleague throughout the process. However, the three participants above expressed frustration with what felt like an exclusionary selection process that only allowed stakeholders to attend the final interviews as audience members. When asked to summarize their experiences during the search phase in a word or phrase, Adrianna paraphrased this phase with one word: “frustrating.”

Lucianna participated in the search and selection process as an administrative stakeholder. While she did not share frustrations over a lack involvement, she detailed disappointment with what she felt was an inauthentic process run by the search firm. The selection process for granting a first interview to Rural5 superintendent candidates lacked administrative involvement. Lucianna described the process as inauthentic.

No, 100% not authentic … I was told that there would be lots of principal input. When we interviewed this search committee, we were told that this is how the talks will go. You'll all have input. … Then they brought forward their list and, if you deviated from that list, they would have some strong hesitations. Anytime they went to someone, it was
here is X, Y, and Z why they're not going to be a good fit. Then if one of mine happened to be one of theirs, it was oh yeah, here's who we're recommending. Quite frankly, I think our list deviated with one person. At the end of the day, we ended up going with the list from the search committee. The board chair said that ‘At the end of the day, this is what they're paid to do is find us the best.’ ‘I called BS to that. Just saying.’

Similarly, Clara shared, when the search firm was selected, she was disappointed because she had experiences with this organization that caused her to be skeptical. She offered, “when you look at all the superintendents that get hired when they are involved, at least in our part of the state, they end up fitting a similar profile – sixty-something, white, males.” This caused her to wonder about the authenticity of the process.

Additionally, Clara, Delfina, and Lucianna each expressed concern about the outgoing superintendent having too much influence over the process. Clara shared reservations that the outgoing superintendent had strong ties to the search committee hired by the district, based on his past consulting work and professional relationships. She stated, “that really worried me, because we needed a fresh perspective, and not one that was beholding to the past.” While Delfina did not express concern about the outgoing superintendent having connections with the search firm, she conveyed disappointment over a lack of transparency in the selection process:

It went through the consulting firm and Dr. [outgoing superintendent], and they made the choice of the candidates … and they provided the ones that they recommended to the school board and then it was set up. So, there was kind of like a process, and we were completely out of everything … Again, it came down to communication transparency. So, there was some frustration on that.
Both participants reported distrust with their outgoing superintendent, which they admitted influenced their apprehensions and perceptions going into the search process, but their concerns were not assuaged by the process. Relatedly, Lucianna shared, based on her fractured relationship and distrust with the outgoing superintendent, she found herself closed off to prospective candidates the exiting superintendent expressed faith in or brought up as strong candidates. She offered, “Because the trust issues were so deep and the walls were so high” when the outgoing superintendent would say “hey, I reached out to that person who's interested. [Ivan] and I would look at each other and be like, okay mark that one off the list.” For Clara, Delfina, and Lucianna their level of trust in the process was impacted by the level of trust they had with the outgoing superintendents.

Geneva expressed a different doubt about the search process. She had concerns about the search process being conducted outside what she thought was a typical superintendent posting and selection time frame and worried that this would negatively influence the candidate pool:

The announcement was in July, the board wanted to move quickly to start this process, which for many of us that was concerning. You're going to post in October, do interviews late fall and hire by December. We're not a highly sought-after school district. I mean, we're just not. … I just think you go out right away how many candidates, in my mind, how many candidates aren't going to put their name in because they're going to wait to see what else is out there? … No one else is posting yet. So, that was some of the discussion of like, "Why are we going so quickly?" And the board kept saying, "Well, we want to get the best candidate." I'm not sure we're going to get the best candidate because they're going to wait and see what else gets posted. We're going so early.
While Geneva was generally positive about the process established by the school board and search firm, her concerns with the timeline of the selection process caused her to be skeptical of the process.

Finally, Lucianna was actively involved in the selection process in her district and when negotiations fell through with the top candidate, she was infuriated by the lack of transparency in the negotiation process. The school board had not rank ordered the other finalist but the school board chair initiated negotiations with one of the other remaining finalists shortly after negotiations fell through with the top candidate. As a result, she reported having to work through apprehension and resentment toward the incoming superintendent:

I also had heard some rumors that the contract negotiations with candidate one were sabotaged … We're not going to give him family medical benefits. He wants family medical. Oh my God, what superintendent takes a job without family medical benefits? … So, we don't offer him family medical benefits, and then we find out that candidate two doesn't need medical benefits, so we're just going to go right down the line and go into … Oh my gosh, look at that. He has agreed to our contract. Bada bing, bada boom, you have a new superintendent. So, when my new superintendent started the job, there was a lot of apprehension there, because I knew what happened, and I also heard from my past superintendent that these two were in cahoots. Also, again, he wasn't the candidate that the admin team wanted, so we felt deflated, I guess you would say, and bummed out.

Frustrations with elements of the search process were expressed by seven of the ten participants who were in their positions with their respective districts during the search phase. The reported concerns were a lack of involvement or input, concerns over the level of influence the outgoing superintendent would wield in the process, and most commonly a perceived lack of
transparency and authenticity in the search and selection process. In fact, other than the concern Geneva expressed over the timeline of the search/selection process potentially negatively impacting the depth and quality of the candidate pool, each of the other concerns can be distilled down to an underlying concern for transparency in the selection process. Moreover, regardless of the level of trust reported with the outgoing superintendent, respondents conveyed concerns over a lack of transparency during the search and selection process, which may have significantly impacted their experience with superintendent turnover during the search phase.

In addition, when asked to summarize their experiences during the search phase in a word or phrase nine of the responses reflect frustration, concern and anxiety: Adrianna “frustrating”, Blanca “curious and anxious,” Clara “concerning”, Delfina “frustrating lack of involvement and transparency”, Estafania “anxious”, Geneva “uncertainty and doubt, self-doubt and doubting the process and school board”, Halina “intensely uncertain”, Ivan “tense”, Lucianna “exhausting and overwhelming”. There was a clear desire for greater transparency throughout the search and selection process reported by participants and the perceived absence of it may have impacted the search phase experience for the administrators in this study. Next, I review the second theme in phase two.

**Informal Vetting**

In this study, nine participants (Adrianna, Blanca, Estafania, Halina, Ivan, Juan, Klaus and Lucianna) expressed they experienced a high level of informal vetting, by stakeholders, of prospective candidates for their open superintendent position. Respondents reported the vetting of known candidates was common across the stakeholder groups identified in this study—teachers/staff, administration (building and district), and parents/community members. The administrators in this study shared they often received reports from other stakeholders about
what had been learned about specific candidates through internet searches and social networks. Four participants (Adrianna, Blanca, Ivan, and Lucianna) admitted to using similar means to investigate prospective candidates themselves.

Geneva reported that initially the speculation starts over who may apply, sharing, “then the rumors start. ‘I heard so-and-so's going to apply, I heard so-and-so.’ You know, this buzz starts coming up. And I'm like, just settle down. Just wait until applicants come in.” Juan shared that amongst the stakeholders in his district there was “A lot of apprehension, a lot of just ‘What are we going to get?’ type mentality. And then we're phoning my second cousin and X that works under this person, ‘What do they say?’ Without a doubt that happened.” Similarly, Adrianna, Blanca, Estafania, Ivan, and Lucianna each shared examples of how the finalist in their districts were informally vetted by stakeholders through internet searches and social networks, either by themselves or other stakeholders. Adrianna shared that she called administrative peers in other districts to get their perspective on the candidates they had worked with. Blanca reported that, “two of the candidates were coming from school districts with International Baccalaureate Programmes, so I may have reached out to the I.B. coordinators in those districts to see if they were supportive of the I.B. or not.” Estafania gave an example of how the information that was informally vetted on candidates would run through the building:

A couple times a week a teacher would catch me in the hallway or the office and ask, ‘did you hear that candidate so and so was this or that to work with in their old district?’ Of course, they never told me where they got their information, but were eager to share what they learned.”

Similarly, Ivan shared that, “because we are a rural community and we work with a couple educational cooperatives, it seemed like someone always knew someone who worked with or
had a relative who worked with one of the candidates.” He felt that this led to a lot of information sharing among the staff. Lucianna described how this informal vetting impacted her workday experience. She reported that, “there were a couple of weeks where it got to the point that I could not walk the hallway without someone wanting to tell me what they heard about one of the finalists.”

Halina illustrated the questioning and investigation process she experienced with stakeholders, as well as the burden she felt to maintain and model a neutral stance in conversations about the candidates:

Yeah, I think the intensity probably came after the search firm sort of narrowed their names down, … So, I think that's when the conversations started really cooking about, "Who are these people coming into our community and why do they want to come to Suburban3? Why would someone want to come here, and what's their angle? And are they going to become a community member?" Then conversations shifted to "Is this person going to be the next superintendent?" And "We want this next person." Things like that. So, I think the professionalism of us and the board had to maintain pretty neutral about what we felt, what we heard.

Lucianna also spoke to the need to manage her emotions and feelings in front of staff during the search process, “I think they were just looking for my body language, … when we were going through the candidates and going through that process, I think they were just trying to feed off of what they thought I was giving off.” Halina also shared the need to be self-regulated in conversations with stakeholders during this phase:
So, there was all this conversation, and as a principal in the middle of that, it's hard because I may or may not have had inside information that I didn't feel comfortable sharing. … So, I think I tried to kind of hang back a little bit, and in those conversations, listen more than talk because I didn't want people to think I knew something that I didn't know. I didn't want people to think I was working behind the scenes or anything like that.

The informal vetting of prospective superintendent candidates was a common theme among the participants in this study. The informal investigations of who might become the next district leader was reportedly done by members in each stakeholder group—teacher/staff, administration, and parents/community members. Respondents revealed they frequently experienced conversations with other stakeholders about what they or someone else reportedly learned about the superintendent candidates. In addition to Halina, Juan and Klaus also shared the responsibility they felt to monitor their statements and even body language when in these informal vetting conversations with members from other stakeholder groups, while also taking the leadership action of modeling an open and neutral stance on each prospective candidate. Klaus explained his self-regulatory approach, “You just kind of listen and take it in, because you're a leader and you don't want to say anything really that would get misinterpreted. … you just want to make sure the transition is really positive.” Juan summarized the leadership responsibility he felt during this phase of superintendent transition, asserting that daily he had to:

Put on that objective hat about stepping back and asking, “who are you representing here.” I think that was definitely a change. I put it into my practice every day … throughout this process it's educating those that weren't part of the process as far as big picture type of items that you can't necessarily see through the trees. … explaining, you need to understand there's more to it than X.
In addition to the participants feeling pressure to maintain neutrality in conversations with stakeholders, the administrators in this study experienced the highest level or frequency of dialogue about the superintendent transition with stakeholder groups during the search phase. Respondents reported discussions with teachers and staff about the pending change in the superintendency or the search and selection process, ranged in frequency from daily to weekly. Discourse with other administrators about the selection process or candidates ranged from multiple times daily to weekly. The search phase was the only phase where each respondent reported weekly or more frequent dialogue with both the teacher/staff and the administration stakeholder groups. This added frequency of dialogue with stakeholders included a higher frequency of administrators being probed for information on the process and candidates.

Based on participant reflections of the stakeholder sentiment, informal vetting was a process that happened organically and persistently during the search phase of superintendent transition. In addition, the frequency of dialogue with stakeholders during the search phase was greater than any other phase of superintendent transition. Participants reported having daily to weekly conversations with stakeholders about the selection process or candidates. The administrators in this study were aware of their leadership responsibility to model and present an openness to the process and candidates, while projecting a neutral stance to stakeholders, during these conversations. The next theme presents the desired attributes the participants of this study were looking for in a new district leader.

**Desired Attributes**

In the course of the interviews, many of the participants articulated some of the attributes they were hoping would be present in the incoming superintendent and within the organizational culture under this new leader while discussing their reflections on the experience of the search
phase. The following section focuses on the desired superintendent and organizational attributes expressly articulated in participants reflections on stakeholder sentiments during the second phase of superintendent transition. The commonly reported desired attributes the participants wanted in their new leader and the organizational culture were: a) high levels of collaboration, b) a leader and environment that is supportive and fosters growth and allows for vulnerability, c) a transparent and honest communicator, and d) a superintendent who is visible in the schools and community. For the purpose of this study, the desired characteristics identified above are summarized and labeled as: a) collaborative, b) supportive, c) candid communicator, and d) visible leader.

The attributes listed above were directly articulated or shared indirectly by participants as they reflected on the search phase. Adrianna summarized her desire for these superintendent attributes with, “I am hopeful for a collaborative communicator who is visible in the community and schools. Who also develops trusting relationships with the admin. team, and is willing to make necessary changes and challenge the status quo.” Blanca shared similar desired superintendent attributes, stating, “I love working with someone who has a collaborative leadership style. I'd like someone who wants to listen, who wants to hear ideas. But I also, really do respect somebody who is willing to make the tough decisions.” Halina expressed a desire for a collaborative and supportive leader who unifies the work of the administrative team and the district as a whole, sharing:

So, there were just these terms that started coming out about what kind of leader we needed, and administratively we needed someone who was going to bring us together as a team and we were kind of working in silos at that time. We needed someone who could start to braid our district better than it's been in the past. … we needed a superintendent
that could be in relationship with our administrative team as a relational leader because I felt like … we didn't really have that.

Lucianna provided the following summary of what she felt her district needed from a new superintendent with, “as I stated previously, we are broken as a district when it comes to trust, so we need a courageously collaborative leader, who will take time to listen, then lead with honesty and authenticity.” Delfina conveyed what her staff and community were looking for in the next district leader with:

Collaboration, communication is huge, and trust and being transparent. I think we have the levy right now that we're going to be looking into, so I think that's another thing that's on everybody's mind is someone that's going to be out within the community and people know that person. So, connectiveness.

Geneva reported the desired attributes of the next superintendent were connected to the leadership experience with the outgoing superintendent. She stated, “because of how the last superintendency ended, we need someone who will come along side our admin team and lean into the work with us, listen and be present enough to know what is really going on.” Klaus also spoke to the connectedness between what the staff and community were looking for and how it was tied to what they had experienced previously in his word or phrase summary of the search phase with, “a focus on what we don’t have or don’t want. Fill a hole.” Relatedly, Ivan articulated a desire for a candid communicator, expressing the number one thing administration and teachers want from the new superintendent is, “transparency and honesty in communications from the superintendent. Wanting to be able to trust the answer even if it is not the answer that we want.” Ivan had reported during the announcement phase that trusting what the outgoing superintendent said required him to “trust and verify, that what she said was true.”
Clara shared how important a visible superintendent was in her school district: “this community values their schools and wants leaders who are available and accessible and present in the schools and the community.” Estafania reflected on the visibility of the outgoing superintendent and felt she had set a standard with staff the next district leader should follow. She offered:

The superintendent’s office is in the High School and the all the buildings are within a 4-mile radius, so the staff are fairly used to seeing the superintendent. I think it will be really important for the next superintendent to be similarly visible in our schools.”

Juan also conveyed the value of a visible leader to their stakeholders, expressing a desire for and importance of the new superintendent to be visible and present in their schools, with:

The new superintendent is going to be coming from outside our community and we really need to pass a levy, so it is going to be really important that our staff and families see the next leader as highly engaged in our schools and community.

The new superintendents in Rural2 and Rural6 school districts both moved into the communities they would be serving prior to officially starting their new positions. Respondents from both of these school districts reported that visibility and involvement in the community were highly valued characteristics with the stakeholders in their districts. Delfina described how the visibility of the new superintendent resonated with community stakeholders and reinforced the importance of the new district leader being a visible member of the community:

It was really important for people to see that he moved to Rural2. That was something that I've heard over and over, that he committed to coming to Rural2, being in Rural2. … like when he was first offered the position back in March, our girls went to the state
tourney, basketball tournament, during the state championship and he was there. He came and he was starting to visit with people and the community members and that was really important, that meant a lot to people that are within the district.

When reflecting on the search phase of their most recent superintendent turnover, the participants in this study identified the following common desired attributes they and other stakeholders wanted in their next superintendent: a) collaborative, b) supportive, c) candid communicator, and d) visible leader. The attributes they desired in their next superintendent were tied directly to the experience they had with the outgoing superintendent. Some respondents yearned for these attributes because they were absent from their experience with the outgoing superintendent, while others desired these characteristics because their previous superintendents personified these attributes. It was evident in the search phase that participants and stakeholders in their district processed the pending change through a comparative lens. The reported desired attributes were consistently in comparison to the degree with which the same attributes were present or absent with the outgoing superintendent. Next, I provide a summary of the search phase themes.

**Phase Two Themes Summarized**

The following themes emerged from participant perspectives on stakeholder sentiment during the search phase of superintendent transition: the search process, informal vetting, and desired attributes. Participants in this study desired greater transparency, and in many cases involvement, throughout the search and selection process. They also reported that stakeholders, including themselves and other administrators, independently and collectively conducted their own informal vetting of the superintendent candidates. It was unclear if this informal vetting of prospective superintendent candidates was influenced by the reported lack of transparency in the
selection process. Candidates also expressed a desire for a new superintendent who is collaborative, supportive, a candid communicator, and visible leader. In summary, the search phase stakeholder sentiments revealed a strong desire for transparency and involvement in the search and selection process, and a stakeholder proclivity to informally investigate prospective superintendents. Also emerging from the stakeholder sentiments during this phase was a common desire that the incoming superintendent be a collaborative, supportive, visible leader and candid communicator who will honor the district values and initiatives that stakeholders considered central to their perceived identity of the district. I present the themes that emerged from the appointment phase of superintendent transition, in the following section.

**Phase Three: Appointment**

The appointment phase is initiated at the conclusion of the search and selection process when a school board finalizes a contract agreement with the next superintendent. This phase extends from the date the school board announces the appointment of the new superintendent until this leader officially starts in their new capacity with school district—usually on July 1st. The following themes surfaced from the reported stakeholder sentiments during phase three, the appointment phase of superintendent transition: a) excitement and optimism, b) appreciation for new superintendent’s early investments, and c) hopeful for an organizational culture of collaboration. The stakeholder sentiment in this phase yielded the three aforementioned themes, which were often expressed in an interconnected manner by participants. This section explores the themes distilled from the reported stakeholder sentiments during the appointment phase in an interconnected manner.
Excitement and Optimism

Seven of the eleven respondents who provided reflections on the stakeholder perspectives during this phase of transition expressed some level of excitement or optimism about the incoming district leader. Juan reported general “excitement and curiosity … administration and teachers were on board with the decision.” Juan also conveyed his personal and professional excitement about the new superintendent during the appointment phase with, “Yep, this person I can work for and this person will be a great leader for our district. So, I was excited. My colleagues were excited.” According to Halina each stakeholder group “largely celebrated the selection of the internal candidate, some internal reluctance based on past experiences, but almost overwhelmingly positively received.” Adrianna shared general enthusiasm despite frustrations with the selection process, “We got the one we wanted, she was rock solid, and the others were not for us. Glad it was her because we were frustrated with the lack of involvement in the process.” Blanca also affirmed her school board’s selection of the new superintendent, stating, “I think we got the best candidate of the finalists. I'm just curious to see what her leadership style is. I feel like she comes across as being a pretty strong person, confident. I like that.”

Faustino, who engaged in the selection process as a community member, before joining the district as the high school principal, reported there was general excitement in the community over the selection of the superintendent. Meanwhile, Ivan referenced selection process concerns while expressing general optimism within the community, “Once the 2nd candidate was named and the community moved past frustration with the loss of 1st candidate, then hopeful. I think everyone was looking forward to change.” Klaus shared that while he joined the district shortly
after the new superintendent was hired, he felt, “the community here seems to have really embraced the new superintendent and are really trying to get to know him.”

In addition, eight of the participants provided a word or phrase summary of the appointment phase that included a form of the word excite. Some were coupled with terms of apprehension, but excitement was the most referenced concept in the respondent’s word or phrase summation of this phase. The predominant theme that emerged from the word or phrase summaries of the participants’ experience during the appointment phase of superintendent turnover was excitement. There were eight responses that included a form of the word excitement, and in seven of those summary statements excitement was coupled with other terms. In four of those instances the term was coupled with a term of apprehension like anxious, nervousness, or uncertainty. Adrianna offered an unaccompanied summary of “exciting,” while Estafania paired “validation and excitement.” Juan and Klaus both provided “excitement and curiosity” as their word or phrase summation. Juan and Klaus explained their curiosity in positive terms that added to their excitement over the appointed superintendent. The four remaining summaries incorporated excitement and connected it with terms or uncertainty. Blanca’s summary for this phase was “anxious and exciting,” while Clara described her experience as having “equal amounts of excitement, curiosity, and nervousness.” Both explained their anxiousness or nervousness was related to what they did not or could not yet know about their new leader. Delfina paraphrased the appointment phase with, “excited and ready, but a little nervous,” and Halina distilled the experience down to “excitement, apprehension and uncertainty.” Both of these participants explained that excitement was the primary sentiment, but until they had more time to work with their new district leader there would be some nervousness.
Excitement was the dominant theme during the appointment phase of superintendent transition. The reported excitement related to the appointment of the new superintendents was influenced or enhanced by the actions of and interaction with the newly appointed district leaders during the third phase of superintendent transition. The following sections explore the interaction between the subsequent themes and their influence on the excitement stakeholders felt during the appointment phase. Next, I explore the theme, appreciation for new superintendent’s early investments.

**Appreciation for New Superintendent’s Early Investments**

Six participants expressed their excitement was based on or amplified by the early investments made by the incoming superintendent prior to officially being on the clock. Each of the superintendents actively engaged with community members and stakeholders during the appointment phase. Participants reported this fostered excitement and optimism in their community. Delfina explained she was “impressed so far” because the new superintendent made a concerted effort to be involved in the community and moved his family into the community prior to officially starting the job. Estafania expressed that as a result of the incoming superintendent taking time to meet with and listen to various stakeholders, “People felt valued and were generally excited.” Adrianna echoed this sentiment, describing the new superintendent as very approachable and a good fit her district’s needs based on her early interactions with the appointed leader. Blanca said the new district leader made a concerted effort to get around the district and into buildings to connect with people. Blanca stated, “After she was hired, she started coming around, and I think she spent time in each building on multiple occasions. Teachers and staff appreciated this, and they wanted to know more about her.” Geneva and Juan both referenced how the incoming superintendent would meet with people in the community to make
connections and listen to stakeholders. Juan specifically recalled the new district leader spent some mornings “hanging out at McDonalds, talking to the coffee goers in the morning … the community very much they liked her, so it was good.” The next section explores another element that contributed to stakeholder excitement and optimism.

**Hopeful for an Organizational Culture of Collaboration**

Five participants reported their excitement was connected to their desire for, or based on, indications the new superintendent would develop a collaborative organizational culture. Blanca, for example, expressed she was “excited to start building a relationship and working with the new superintendent” and wondered, “what will her leadership style be, will it be collaborative?” Adrianna and Delfina shared their initial interactions with the incoming superintendent were encouraging and they looked forward to working alongside the new superintendent, based on the expressions of a collaborative leadership style each heard. Adrianna shared, “she seemed great, really down to earth, and talked about how her focus is all about supporting and working with the building administrators so they can effectively lead their buildings so students get what they need.” Delfina stated the new superintendent, “seems interested in hearing what we feel is working and where we need to make improvements.” Clara declared she was “excited for a new, hopefully more supportive and collaborative culture to be developed” under the new district leader. Finally, Ivan captured this theme in his single word summation of the appointment phase, “hopeful”. Ivan explained he was looking forward to working alongside the new superintendent and seeing what he may bring to the district.

This phase typically extended for months, usually from around March through June, and generally consisted of a handful of interactions between the participants or other stakeholders and the incoming superintendent. However, the appointment phase stakeholder interactions with
the newly appointed district leader appeared to leave strong, generally positive impressions on
the participants in this study, contributing to a sense of excitement and optimism for stakeholders
and participants. The following section provides a summary of the appointment phase themes
collectively.

**Phase Three Themes Summarized**

During the appointment phase of superintendent transition, the respondent’s reflections
on stakeholder sentiment revealed the themes of a) excitement and optimism, b) appreciation for
new superintendent’s early investments, and c) hopeful for an organizational culture of
collaboration. Participants’ responses presented these themes in an interconnected manner,
leading to the conclusion that the sentiments within each theme contributed to the sentiments of
the other themes. The respondent’s reports of stakeholders feeling general excitement and
optimism was often connected to the interactions they had with the incoming superintendent
based on the new leader’s purposeful investments of time and presence in the community.
Moreover, these initial political and symbolic investments by the incoming district leader often
left an impression that they would lead the district in a collaborative manner, which further
contributed to the excitement and optimism reportedly felt by stakeholders, especially
administrators. While three distinct themes emerged from the stakeholder sentiment related the
third phase of superintendent transition, excitement and optimism was the overarching theme
that contributed to and was reinforced by the other themes. The fourth and final phase of
superintendent transition will be explored in the subsequent sections.

**Phase Four: Installation**

The final phase of superintendent transition in this study was the installation phase. This
phase began when the new district leader officially assumed the duties of their new role,
generally at the start of the new fiscal year on July 1st and extended through the first year of their leadership. Examination of the reported stakeholder sentiments during phase four, the installation phase of superintendent transition, uncovered the following themes: a) campaign promises, and b) challenges status quo and pushes us to grow. Campaign promises refers to reported stakeholder sentiment focused on a desire to see an alignment between the new superintendent’s leadership, actions, and communication with what stakeholders heard from, and about, the new leader during the selection process. Respondents also shared that, at least among administration, there was an appreciation for the new superintendent’s focus on professional learning and growth, while also reporting an appreciation for the open and clear communication they were experiencing with their new district leader. The next section explores the theme of campaign promises.

**Campaign Promises**

Despite consistently expressing excitement about the newly appointed district leader during the appointment phase, respondents reported the installation phase was a trust building phase where stakeholders often took the perspective of let’s see if you are who you said you would be. The establishment of trust with the new superintendent was often reportedly tied to stakeholders wanting to see an alignment between what they thought they learned about the new superintendent when she/he was a candidate, and who they are and how they operate after being installed as the new district leader. The installation phase was characterized by several participants as an “are you who you said you are” assessment period of the new superintendent. Adrianna expressed this sentiment when reflecting on stakeholder sentiment during the installation phase:
I think there's a lot of trust building that's happening, a lot of are you going to do the things you said you were going to do? Are you the person that we heard about in your interviews? Are you the leader that we heard from other colleagues that you were going to be, from other districts?

Blanca shared similar sentiment, expressing that while she welcomed the fresh perspective, during the installation phase she often wondered, “Is there another agenda? Or will we pursue what was stated in the interview process?” This sentiment was common and appeared to be an ongoing assessment by stakeholders during the early installation period. Juan offered that he and his administrative peers were “onboard but wanting to know what the new Super is all about, in practice, on the daily … Administration has lingering excitement but growing apprehension, did we pick the right person?” Relatedly, Lucianna expressed that “teachers had a wait and see perspective,” while Geneva observed that, “administration and teachers seem to always be trying to navigate and figure the new superintendent out without often actually going to her. More indirect information gathering.” Meanwhile, Estafania conveyed how this ongoing assessment of the new superintendent’s congruence with stakeholder expectations, based on the selection process, can also lead to doubt and insecurity, stating, “initially people were hopeful and excited and felt listened to. Now there is less communication and some decisions and how they were handled have led to some mistrust, doubt and insecurity.”

During the installation phase of superintendent transition, the reported stakeholder sentiment revealed a consistent focus on determining if the new district leader’s actions and leadership aligned with what stakeholders anticipated and were looking forward to, based on the selection process. The title given to this theme is campaign promises and is exemplified in Adrianna’s expression of stakeholder statement: “You promised this when you were hired. So, I
need to see that follow through now … people want to know if you are going to be what we thought you would be … and what we got excited about.” Adrianna and others referred to the installation phase as time of “trust building” and connected sentiments within the theme of campaign promises to the process of building trust with their new district leader.

This was also reflected in the installation phase experiential summaries provided by participants, when asked to paraphrase their experience during the appointment phase in a word or phrase. There were four phrasal summaries that expressed uncertainty as the prevailing administrator reflective sentiment during the installation phase. Adrianna offered “uncertainty and trust building” in her summary statement, while Estafania paraphrased the experience with “optimism has turned to uncertainty and questions of trust.” Geneva summarized phase four with, “continued uncertainty with some self-doubt and insecurity,” and Juan succinctly summed up the experience in this phase with the description of “excitement and apprehension.” Three of the four participants who defined the installation phase with uncertainty or apprehension, had used either a term of excitement or hope in their experiential summary of the previous phase of superintendent transition. In their interviews, these respondents shared their excitement, during the appointment phase, to work with the incoming superintendent had shifted to uncertainty after their installation based on some early actions or decisions by the incoming superintendent. They explained they had been excited by what they learned about the incoming superintendent through the search process and their initial interactions prior to their installation. Then early actions, communications, or decisions by the new superintendent caused these administrators to question the alignment between what they had expected and hoped for under the new superintendent’s leadership and what they were seeing in practice.
Conversely, two participants reported they were seeing early indications that the new superintendent would lead in a manner that aligned with their campaign promises and what they had hoped for in a new district leader. Lucianna was hoping to find the trusting relationship she did not have with her former superintendent, and she offered the following installation phase summary, “the guard is slowly going down, and trust is building.”. Meanwhile, Klaus, who was new to the community of Rural6 and was looking for indications that trust was going to be an integral part of his relationship with the superintendent and other leaders in the district, provided “a little guarded” as his summary for phase four. He moved his family into the community when he took the job and was looking forward to raising his family there and felt that longevity in the position and district was contingent upon a trusting organizational culture. For different reasons both of these participants shared they were hopeful but not ready to be fully vulnerable with their new superintendent. The theme of challenges status quo and pushes us to grow also contributed to the development of trust between the incoming superintendent. This theme and the related participant sentiments will be explored next.

**Challenges Status Quo and Pushes us to Grow**

Several participants in this study reported an increased focused on professional learning under their new superintendent and a specific attention to challenging the status quo in service of student engagement, learning and inclusion. The respondents who divulged experiencing this intentionality of focus on improving student learning and the student experience through a clear commitment to developing the educators, expressed an appreciation for this organizational attribute under the new superintendent. Some administrators reported feeling challenged to grow in ways they had not under the previous superintendent or ever in their current school district.
Participants who experienced a new or renewed focus and even pressure to attend to their own professional learning under their new district leader, expressed appreciation for the challenges of being both a leader and a purposeful learner simultaneously. Delfina, for example, shared she was, “impressed so far, initial work has been collaborative, and communication has been good. we are learning together as an administrative team and it is exciting and engaging… because we're all trying to learn from one another.” Halina explained, the new superintendent “is pushing the admin team to research, reflect, learn and challenge the status quo.” Contributing to the theme of challenging the status quo, Faustino explained the new superintendent challenges the status quo and is very focused on administration and teacher learning and growth:

Teaching and learning are her passion, and so she is pushing all of us as administrators, to do more learning ourselves. … I think that's probably the biggest thing that she wants to get across to us as admin, as well as the staff, is we need to break the status quo of the predictability of what's been going on, if we want to change the outcomes and student experience.

Halina reported experiencing something she had not previously experienced as a school administrator in her current school district, and she appreciated it:

For the first time in my 14 years, we are committed to thinking about instruction, and for the first time in 14 years we are actually expected to read research on a weekly level, and we're expected to dedicate hours each week to that work … And we're trying to change the culture that thinking is the work, because if we had a deep understanding of learning, how kids learn, how people learn, what good instruction is, then we're going to finally see the change in our stagnant achievement rates.
Only one participant reported that the increased focus and accountability to learning led to some professional insecurities among her principal colleagues. Geneva shared that some of her administrative colleagues were concerned about the increased accountability that may come with the superintendent change, since they had been left alone to run their own buildings unfettered under the previous superintendent. Based on her conversations with principals during the installation phase, she felt some struggled with the added focus on professional practice and challenging the status quo. Geneva shared, “They knew she was going to be very hands-on … then they recognized, ‘Oh crap, the bar is going here, and now I really don't know if I can put the bar there.’” This was the only example of the increased focus on professional learning and challenging the status quo in a district that was not embraced and appreciated by administrative stakeholders, among the participants in this study.

This theme was also found or reflected in some participant’s word or phrase summation of their experience during the installation phase. Four respondents summarized their phase four experience with either optimism or being challenged to grow or both. Delfina succinctly summarized phase four with “optimistic,” while Halina offered “optimistic and being challenged to grow and think differently.” Similarly, Faustino paraphrased his experiences during the installation phase as “encouraged, growing and stretched” and Ivan condensed it to “hopeful, opportunity to grow.” The fifth expression of optimism was found in Blanca’s “let’s do this, let’s get to work” summary. Which she explained came from an optimism and eagerness to jump into the work with the new superintendent and get to know this new leader and where they were going as a school district under her leadership.

The respondents in this study who experienced an increased focus on professional learning under their new superintendent expressed an appreciation for being challenged to
continue to grow and develop professionally and as leaders. Their responses reflected the process of learning collaboratively as administrators contributed to the development of a sense of trust between the participants and their new superintendent. The administrators who were encouraged or pushed to learn and challenge the status quo in their schools and school district conveyed a sense of professional engagement they felt was missing under their previous superintendent, and they were excited to be working in a learning organization, which demanded they be lead learners in the organization. Meanwhile, the participants who did not report their new superintendent had an overt focus on the professional development of staff and administration, often referred to this phase with metered optimism and a wait and see approach to their relationship with the new district leader. An explicit attentiveness to the professional growth and development of educators and leaders, by the newly installed superintendent, had a positive impact on the establishment of trust with the administrators in this study. I summarize the installation phase themes in the next section.

*Phase Four Themes Summarized*

The themes that emerged from the participants’ reflections on stakeholder sentiments and their paraphrased summations of their experiences during the fourth phase of superintendent transition were a) campaign promises, and b) challenges status quo and pushes us to grow. Both of these themes appear to be more tied to administrative stakeholder perspectives than any other stakeholder group, since the majority of the stakeholder sentiments reported about the installation phase of superintendent transition were mostly reflective of the participants experience or that of their fellow administrators. Additionally, this was the phase with the lowest reported frequency of dialogue between the administrators in this study and other stakeholder groups, which may have contributed to administratively focused reflections on stakeholder
sentiments. Another factor that may have influenced the stakeholder sentiment being more administratively specific was the timing of installation. Each new superintendent took over on July 1st, at the start of the new fiscal year, when most administrators reported having limited contact with other stakeholder groups.

In addition to the stakeholder sentiment being administratively specific during this phase, both of these themes reflected a trust-centric mindset of administrators during the installation of the new superintendent. The theme of campaign promises reflected an inherent question of trust that can be paraphrased as: are you who you said you are, and can we trust you to be who we thought you would be and got excited about? During the appointment phase most participants felt their districts got the right hire for their current organizational reality and needs. Then during the installation phase, the establishment of trust with the new superintendent was partially contingent upon affirmations that the new leader would be who they were perceived to be by stakeholders, based on what was learned about the new superintendent through the formal vetting (the selection process) and informal vetting (social network and internet information gathering) of the candidate during the selection process.

The theme of challenges the status quo and pushes us to grow also had a direct impact on establishing trusting relationships with the administrators in this study. The respondents who reported their new superintendent was focused on their professional learning and development while challenging the status quo to improve student learning felt professionally engaged and valued, differently than they had with their previous superintendent. These participants also referred to this phase in optimistic terms and with a growing sense of trust with their new district leader. Meanwhile, the respondent who did not report experiencing an intentional focus on professional learning and challenging the status quo by their new superintendent, referred to the
installation phase with constrained optimism or a “wait and see” trust building phase sentiment. A devout attention to the development of district leaders and educators by the incoming superintendents appeared to expedite the establishment of trust between district administrators and the new superintendents who implemented this focus.

In conclusion, the reported stakeholder sentiments during the installation phase of superintendent transition were mostly reflective of administrative stakeholder perspectives and reflected an attention to the establishment of trust between the administrators in this study and their incoming superintendent. During the installation phase, the question of who will be the next district leader was replaced by questions of trust and the establishment of trust with the new superintendent. The underlying trust questions that emerged during the installation phase can be summarized as a) will you be the leader we thought you would be, and b) do you care about my growth as a leader and learner as well as improving student outcomes? The administrators in this study appeared to be focused on establishing answers to these questions for themselves during the installation phase. Next, I discuss the key findings extracted from the interview data compiled in this study, through the structured questioning approach developed for this inquiry.

**Impact Radius Key Findings**

The structured questioning approach developed for this study was designed to capture participants’ reflections on their experience with the phenomenon of superintendent turnover in a sequenced manner that also provided opportunities for respondents to offer organic, open-ended reflections. Additionally, the structured questioning approach was designed to support the analysis of the participants’ experiences by providing a structure for exploring commonalities or themes within each phase of superintendent transition. In brief, respondents were asked to reflect on the four phases of change or transition during the phenomenon of superintendent turnover:
Phase 1, the announcement of change (retirement, resignation, non-continuation, termination);
Phase 2, the search process; Phase 3, the appointment of new hire; and Phase 4, installation of
new superintendent (this phase spans from the official start date for the new hire through the first
year of their superintendency, if applicable to the participant). After outlining each of the
previous phases of transition during turnover in the superintendency, I asked the participants to
respond to the following questions as they relate to each stakeholder group (a. teachers/staff, b.
administration, c. parents/community members):

1) How frequently did you find yourself in conversation or discussion with each
   stakeholder group about the transition during this phase?
2) What was the general sentiment of each stakeholder group during this phase of
   transition?
3) If you were to summarize your experiences during this phase in a word or phrase,
   what would it be?

As result of the structured questioning approach, this study generated key findings for
each phase of transition and one for the overall experience with phenomenon of superintendent
turnover. In addition, the impact of trust, based on reported level of trust with the outgoing
superintendent, was considered within the themes that emerged from each phase of
superintendent transition. Frequency of dialogue data tables are found in the Appendices
(Appendix H – Appendix K) to support conclusions related to the frequency of dialogue
experienced by participants. There are five key findings for this study, one key finding related to
the generalized experience (overview of the experience) and one finding for each of four phases
of transition (phase 1-announcement, phase 2-search, phase 3-appointment, phase 4-installation).
The key findings from this study are presented next and conclude this chapter.
Overview of the Superintendent Transition Experience Findings

The administrators in this study experienced curiosity, excitement, uncertainty, and anxiety throughout their experience with the phenomenon of superintendent turnover. In addition, these principals and district leaders from small single high school, school districts experienced a high frequency of dialogue with the teacher/staff and administrator stakeholder groups during the first three phases superintendent turnover – from the time of the announcement of turnover in the superintendency to the appointment of the new superintendent – reporting daily to weekly conversations related to change in the superintendency with these stakeholder groups as the norm. Meanwhile, administrators who characterized their relationships with the outgoing superintendent with distrust, experienced an even higher frequency of dialogue with stakeholders than their colleagues who reported having a trusting relationship with their former superintendent during these phases of transition.

Key Finding 1: Administrators experienced curiosity, excitement, uncertainty, and anxiety throughout the process. There appeared to be frequent discussion about the superintendents’ turnover. The discussions continued with stakeholders throughout their experience of superintendent turnover. When there was distrust between the administrators and the outgoing superintendent each of these elements was intensified.

The Announcement Phase Findings

Administrators experienced a variety of mixed emotions during the announcement phase of superintendent transition, ranging from excitement and curiosity to uncertainty and anxiety on a personal level, and from readiness for change to concerns for continuity on a systemic level. In addition, administrators who characterized their relationships with the outgoing superintendent with distrust, experienced a higher frequency of dialogue with all stakeholders than their
colleagues who reported having a trusting relationship with their former superintendent, while also reporting experiencing personal excitement and relief during the announcement phase of superintendent transition. Meanwhile, uncertainty, anxiety, and concern were the most commonly experienced emotions among the administrators in this study during the announcement phase, based on their word or phrase summations of their experiences during this phase.

**Key Finding 2:** The administrators experienced a variety of mixed emotions on a personal and professional level during the announcement phase of superintendent transition, ranging from excitement and curiosity to uncertainty and anxiety with the latter being the most commonly experienced. Administrators who reported distrust with the outgoing superintendent experienced a higher frequency of dialogue with stakeholders, relative to the change in the superintendency, and expressed feeling personal relief and excitement during the announcement phase. They welcomed change in the process of hiring a new superintendent.

**The Search Phase Findings**

While all administrators in this study experienced the highest frequency of dialogue related to change in the superintendency with the a) teacher/staff and b) administration stakeholder groups during the search phase of superintendent transition, the administrators who characterized their relationships with the outgoing superintendent with distrust experienced an even higher frequency of dialogue with all stakeholders than their colleagues who reported having a trusting relationship with their former superintendent. In addition, the search phase is the only phase of superintendent transition that was consistently experienced negatively by the participants in this study, which was reflected in the word or phrase summaries participants
provided to describe their experiences during this phase. Meanwhile, the administrators and stakeholders in this study had two common desires for the search/selection phase: a) transparency and involvement in the selection process, and b) a new superintendent who is a collaborative, supportive, visible leader, and candid communicator who will honor the district values and initiatives that stakeholders considered central to their perceived identity of the district.

**Key Finding 3:** The search phase of superintendent transition was experienced negatively and with the highest frequency of dialogue with staff and administrative stakeholders, compared to other phases of transition. Administrators commonly desired transparency and involvement in the selection process and the hiring of a superintendent who is a collaborative, supportive, visible leader who is a candid communicator and willing to honor the values and programs that are considered central to the psyche of the school district.

**The Appointment Phase Findings**

Administrators consistently expressed and experienced excitement and optimism during the appointment phase of superintendent transition and conveyed that they and other stakeholders desired an organizational culture of collaboration under the newly appointed superintendent. Meanwhile, the administrators who characterized their relationships with the outgoing superintendent with distrust experienced a higher frequency of dialogue with administrative stakeholders than their colleagues who reported having a trusting relationship with their former superintendent.
Key Finding 4: The administrators experienced excitement and optimism during the appointment phase of superintendent transition and desired an organizational culture of collaboration under the newly appointed superintendent.

The Installation Phase Findings

The installation phase of superintendent transition is characterized as a trust building phase by administrators (primarily) and stakeholders as they seek to establish trust in their relationship with the new district leader, while primarily focused on developing answers to the following questions: a) will you be the leader we thought you would be? and b) do you care about my growth as a leader and learner as well as improving student outcomes?

Key Finding 5: The administrators sought to establish trust in their relationship with the new district leader, during the installation phase of superintendent transition, while primarily focused on developing answers to the following questions: a) will you be the leader we thought you would be?, and b) do you care about my growth as a leader and learner as well as improving student outcomes?

The key findings from this study were developed through careful coding and analysis of the themes that emerged from the interview data, as a result of the structured questioning approach developed for this study. In Chapter Five I used three established theoretical frames from the education and organizational leadership fields to analyze the findings. The application of these theoretical frames contributed to better understanding regarding how principals in small, single high school, school districts experienced the phenomenon of superintendent turnover.
CHAPTER FIVE: THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

The purpose of this study was to explore how principals and district leaders in small, single high school, school districts experience change or turnover in the superintendent position. Moreover, this study examined superintendent and principal relationships during periods of transition, including departure of the residing superintendent and installation of the successor. I focused on assessing the perceived effects of superintendent turnover on principals as they navigate the potential turbulence caused by superintendent turnover in small school districts. I adopted a phenomenological interview approach for this study conducting 12 interviews with participants from six different school districts, ranging in size from 1149 to 4568 students, serving two suburban and four rural communities.

The school districts represented in this study had four men and two women outgoing superintendents who were replaced by three men and three women incoming superintendents. The participants in this inquiry represent the following subgroups: a) eight women and four men administrators, b) 10 building principals and two district level administrators, c) seven rural and five suburban administrators. The length of the participants’ careers in education ranged from 13 to 45 years, with an average career length of 24 years, representing 297 years of collective experience in education. The duration of the participant’s experience in administration varied from four to 27 years. Each respondent identified as white and had worked with at least four superintendents in their career, and none more than six.

**Theories and Findings**

I developed and implemented a structured questioning approach for this study which focused on the participants’ experiences during each of the phases of superintendent transition established in this study—the announcement, search, appointment, and installation phases. The
process of reviewing and analyzing the participant’s interviews yielded several categorical sub-findings, related to each phase of superintendent transition, as well as the overall experience of superintendent turnover. These categorical sub-findings were consolidated into five key findings—one for the overall experience and one for each phase of superintendent transition. The five key findings of this study were analyzed utilizing the following theoretical frameworks: the Bridges Transition Model (Bridges, 2016), the four-frame model (Bolman & Deal, 2017), and the collective trust model (Forsyth et al., 2011). These theories or frameworks were selected based on their broad applicability to education and organizational leadership and their relevance to the themes that emerged from a scholarly review of literature. I will first analyze the key findings independently through the Bridges Transition Model. Then I will explore the key findings through collectively applying the Four-Frame Model and the Collective Trust Model to them. The key findings that were harvested from the interview data in this study and explored thoroughly in chapter four are interpreted in the subsequent sections.

Interpretation Through the Bridges Transition Model

Every superintendent turnover represents both an organizational change and a series of individual transition stories experienced by the outgoing and incoming superintendents, as well as the administrators and other stakeholders who remain in the school district to work through the transition to a new district leader and their vision for the district moving forward. The Bridges Transition Model is built on the premise that change and transition are not synonymous terms (Bridges, 2016). Asserting that change is a situational and external influence in an organization or person’s life, like a corporate merger or getting a new boss or superintendent, while transition is an internal and psychological process individuals go through personally or professionally as a result of the change. However, a personal or organizational change can only
be actualized after those involved in the change have moved through the three phases of transition outlined in the Bridges Transition model. For any change to take hold, people have to move through the transitional phases of a) endings or letting go of the past, followed by b) the neutral zone where the past does not apply and the new reality has not yet materialized, and finally enter c) a new beginning (Bridges, 2016). While a change in the superintendency is a situational factor that is external to building and district administrators, they must work through the phases of transition during this turnover in district leadership for the organization to move forward in support of the new superintendent’s vision for the school district.

The key findings in this study indicate the participants progressed through a transition process that aligned with the elements of the Bridges Transition Model. Moreover, the interview data and key findings revealed the superintendent turnover process and the phases of superintendent transition described in this study aligned to, and afforded for, the phases of transition outlined in the Bridges Transition Model: a) endings, losing, letting go, b) the neutral zone, c) new beginnings (Bridges, 2016). The administrators in this inquiry first processed through the ending, loss, and letting go of their relationship with the outgoing superintendent on a personal and professional level, regardless of the how they characterized or valued the relationship, during the announcement phase of superintendent transition. This was followed by a neutral zone experience, during the search phase, where there were high levels of uncertainty and anxiety, and yet some reported excitement for the possibilities that a change in leadership may usher in. Then, during the appointment phase, the administrators in this study expressed excitement and optimism toward the new leadership and the next phase of their district’s evolution. Finally, each participant experienced a new beginning with the installation of their new district leader with several reporting positive sentiments about the function and culture of
the district-wide administrative team under their new superintendent. Bridges (2016) insisted, “transition starts with an ending. That is paradoxical but true” (p. 8). Therefore, I start with the ending, the announcement phase of superintendent transition, which is initiated by a school board announcement of a pending turnover in the superintendency.

*Announcement Equals Endings*

“Change and endings go hand in hand: change causes transitions, and transition starts with an ending. If things change within an organization, at least some of the employees and managers are going to have to let go of something” (Bridges, 2016, p. 27). A key finding in this inquiry is that during the announcement phase of superintendent transition, the administrators in this study experienced a variety of mixed emotions on a personal and professional level, ranging from excitement and curiosity to uncertainty and anxiety with the latter being the most commonly experienced. The expression of anxiety and uncertainty as the most prevalent emotion during the announcement phase was often tied to administrators feeling the loss of a trusting mentor relationship with the outgoing superintendent, and a wondering if they would have a similar relationship with the next district leader.

Adrianna shared she had a very trusting, personal and professional relationship with the outgoing superintendent, and wondered if she could be similarly vulnerable with a new superintendent:

Because of my relationship with (the outgoing superintendent), and how much I feel supported by her, and knowing that she really will do whatever she can do to help me be successful, I fear what a new superintendent's going to bring to the table. … What will their support look like? I feel like, right now I can pretty much call her (outgoing superintendent), and say, "Hey, I'm struggling with this. What are your thoughts?"
Without the fear of judgment, or her looking down on me … I trust the relationship that I have with her and know that that's going to take time to build with someone new.

Others similarly processed the announcement of change through a lens of loss, such as Blanca, “will I be able to be as vulnerable with the next superintendent, and will they care about me as a person and professional the same way she (outgoing superintendent) did?” Estafania reported that the outgoing superintendent, “had my back and I knew she would be in my corner. I hope I can experience that with the next superintendent.” Meanwhile, others, who characterized their relationship with the outgoing superintendent with distrust, expressed relief and excitement at the loss of that relationship. Clara directly stated, “I wish it had happened sooner,” while Lucianna shared, “I was celebrating. I was thinking of running home to my husband and high fiving. I don't know. You've got to be in my situation to know I guess.” Each of these were an expression of loss or letting go and reinforce a tenet of the Bridges Transition Model which is, “Before you can begin something new, you have to end what used to be … Beginnings depend on endings” (Bridges, 2016, p. 27).

Bridges (2016) compared the transition process to some traditional rites of passage rituals, where the old way of being has to die or be laid to rest before the participant can emerge anew. Bridges considered the endings phase a time when those experiencing transition must reconcile with an ending and loss, and found that denial, anxiety, shock, and confusion are common during this phase of transition. This aligns with the aforementioned key finding that the administrators in this study experienced mixed emotions during the announcement phase, ranging from excitement and curiosity to uncertainty and anxiety, with the latter being most commonly experienced by participants. In this inquiry, the administrators had to let go of or release elements of their relationship with the outgoing superintendent, without knowing if the
traits they valued, or did not value, would be present with the incoming district leader. The loss of the certainty of knowing how to navigate their work and relationship with the outgoing superintendent was the beginning of their individual transition processes. This was followed by a neutral zone experience during the search and appointment phases of superintendent transition.

**The Neutral Zone of the Search and Appointment Phases**

William Bridges (2016) discovered the neutral zone is a time of disorientation and reorientation, when individuals and organizations are “going through an in-between time when the old is gone but the new isn’t fully operational. We call this time the “neutral zone:” it’s when the critical psychological realignments and repatterning’s take place” (p. 5). He described this as a time when uncertainty, tension, frustrations, and anxiety are often prevalent. However, Bridges (2016) explained that the neutral zone is also a time that is “ hospitable to new ideas … it is a time that is ripe with creative opportunity” (p. 49). The neutral zone provides the conditions that allow for individuals and organizations to emerge with a new identity, ready to embrace a new reality and new ways of being and working. The journey of the administrators in this study followed a similar emotional and experiential arc, with uncertainty and anxiety being the most common descriptors of the search phase, while excitement and optimism were also consistent sentiments of the appointment phase for the administrators in this study.

A key finding in this study was that the search phase of superintendent transition was experienced negatively and with the highest frequency of dialogue with staff and administrative stakeholders, compared to other phases of transition. Based on participant word or phrase summaries, the search phase of superintendent turnover was predominantly paraphrased in terms or phrases with overtly negative connotations such as tense, frustrating, intensely uncertain, and exhausting and overwhelming. While there were two summary expressions of curiosity and one
of excitement, there were 10 examples of this phase being summarized with words or phrases that presented clearly negative connotations. This aligns to Bridges’ (2016) description of the neutral zone as a time of uncertainty, tension, frustrations, and anxiety. Not surprisingly, under these conditions, the themes that emerged from the search phase were: search process frustrations, informal vetting, and desired attributes.

As a result of the anxiety, uncertainty, and tension of the search phase the administrators in this inquiry first reported frustration with a lack of transparency in the selection process, then shifted their attention to informally vetting the candidates in the absence of information coming from the school board, which led them to focus on the attributes they wanted or did not want in the next superintendent. Finally, they focused on their concerns for continuity, in the face of a pending change in the superintendency. The participants knew programmatic change was possible if not inevitable with a change in district leadership but wanted to be sure the core values and programs they felt gave their districts an identity were not a casualty of the change in the superintendency. Each of these themes reflect the process of letting go and dealing with loss that contributes to the reorientation that has to happen in the neutral zone according to the Bridges Transition Model.

Another element of key finding #3 is that the administrators in this study experienced the highest frequency of dialogue with staff and administrative stakeholders, compared to other phases of transition. On the surface, this seemingly contradicts Bridges’ (2016) assertion that, “the neutral zone is a lonely place. People feel isolated …” (p. 53). However, while the administrators in this study reported the highest frequency of dialogue with staff and administration during the search phase, they also reported having to be fairly guarded in their conversations. They felt compelled to project a positive outlook about the search process and the
pending change in leadership, even when they had frustrations or concerns themselves with the process or possible candidates. The isolation of leading from the middle during the search process was well articulated by Halina:

So there was all this conversation, and as a principal in the middle of that, it's hard because I may or may not have had inside information that I didn't feel comfortable sharing. … So I think I tried to kind of hang back a little bit, and in those conversations, listen more than talk because I didn't want people to think I knew something that I didn't know. I didn't want people to think I was working behind the scenes or anything like that … So, I think the professionalism of us and the board had to maintain pretty neutral about what we felt, what we heard.

Lucianna provided another example of the need to be guarded as an administrator during the search phase: “I think they were just looking for my body language … I think they were just trying to feed off of what they thought I was trying to give off.” Each of these examples provide an understanding of the duality of the search phase for administrators relative to the high frequency of dialogue with stakeholders they experienced related to the superintendent turnover. While they experienced the highest level of dialogue with staff and administrative stakeholder groups, they also felt significant professional obligation to present a positive and neutral stance toward the selection process and the candidates to their staff. The need to be guarded and positive during interactions with staff about the superintendent turnover meant they had few people they could process their own authentic feelings and concerns with during the search phase. This supports Bridges’ (2016) contention that the neutral zone can be a lonely place, even when the frequency of conversations with stakeholders may be at a high point.
Bridges (2016) used the story of Moses and the Israelites wandering the wilderness as a classic example of the neutral zone. Bridges insisted the neutral zone is a time of reorientation where people and organizations let go of the past and redefine who they are and where they are going. Relatedly, the administrators in this study crystalized what they wanted in their next leader during the search phase. This was reflected in the theme of desired attributes that emerged from the interviews during participant reflections on the search phase, and was captured in the final element of key finding #3: Administrators commonly desire transparency and involvement in the selection process and hope it will result in the hiring of a superintendent who is a collaborative, supportive, visible leader who is a candid communicator and willing to honor the values and programs that are considered central to the psyche of the school district. With a clear focus on the desired attributes of the next district leader, the administrators in this study continued their journey through the neutral zone, entering the appointment phase of superintendent transition.

The administrators reported feeling the newly appointed superintendent had the traits they were looking for in a new leader. For example, Adrianna expressed, "Oh yeah, she's it. She was pretty rock solid. Then I think there was some excitement about, all right, she's going to be great. And we were really excited about her.” Blanca offered another affirmation of the appointment of the new superintendent in her district with, “we got the one we wanted. I look forward to working with her.” Key finding #4 reflected this general sentiment: The administrators in this study experienced excitement and optimism during the appointment phase of superintendent transition and desired an organizational culture of collaboration under the newly appointed superintendent.
The administrators reached a point of reorientation and general enthusiasm toward the leadership of their newly appointed district leader during the appointment phase. This phase of the superintendent transition generally lasted from the time the school board announced the new superintendent hire until the time they officially assumed the role and duties of superintendent, typically on July 1st. This phase usually lasted a couple to several months and afforded the administrators in this study time to interact with the new superintendent, leading to the sense of excitement and optimism reported in key finding #4. The transition time afforded by the appointment phase, allowed the participants to work through their internal and psychological transition processes, which Bridges (2016) insisted must happen before individuals or organizations can successfully launch a new beginning. “Because transition is a process by which people unplug from an old world and plug into a new world, we can say that transition begins with an ending and finishes with a beginning” (p. 5).

**Installation Initiates New Beginnings**

William Bridges (2016) asserted, “coming out of the transition and making a new beginning. This is when people develop the new identity, experience the new energy, and discover the new sense of purpose that makes the change begin to work” (p. 5). Furthermore, Bridges defined the new beginnings phase as a time when individuals must recommit to the direction or vision of the organization, especially if it is a new vision or direction. The administrators in this study emerged from the wilderness of the neutral zone when they entered the installation phase of superintendent transition. This is the time when the new superintendent’s vision for the district starts to be articulate and materialize. This is also the time when the participants in this study had to recommit to their work under new leadership and a new vision. While each reported positive initial impression of their new district leader, they were
focused on trust and the establishment of trust in their relationship with their new superintendent. This was captured in key finding #5: The administrators in this study sought to establish trust in their relationship with the new district leader, during the installation phase of superintendent transition, while primarily focused on developing answers to the following questions, a) will you be the leader we thought you would be? and b) do you care about my growth as a leader and learner as well as improving student outcomes?

Many of the administrators in this study reported that there was a culture of professional learning under their new superintendent, and that the district-wide administrative team was learning together for maybe even the first time. Halina stated, “for the first time in my 14 years we are committed to thinking … about instruction, and … we are actually expected to read research on a weekly basis, and we're expected to dedicate hours each week to that work.” Faustino described the focus of the work under his new superintendent with, “teaching and learning is her passion, and so she is pushing all of us as administrators, to do more learning ourselves.” While Delfina echoed this sentiment with, “we are learning together as an administrative team and it is exciting and engaging … because we're all trying to learn from one another.” An investment in the professional learning of the administrators, by the new superintendents, clearly helped the individual participants launch their new beginnings under their new district leaders. However, it was also evident that these administrators continued to assess the level of trust in their relationship with the new superintendent and the degree to which they felt comfortable being vulnerable with this new leader. While the installation phase ushered in new beginnings for the participants in this study, as a result of the collaborative, developmentally oriented approach taken by the new superintendents in this study, there was an
ongoing need for these new leaders to continue to nurture trust in their relationships with the building and district administrators in their new school districts.

**Conclusions on Bridges Transition Model**

The Bridges Transition Model provides description and understanding of the experience the administrators in this study had with superintendent turnover. There was clear alignment between the phases of superintendent transition defined in this study and the Bridges Transition Model. Moreover, the process and timeline most school districts follow when experiencing turnover in the superintendency affords educators, especially administrators, time to process through the internal and psychological transition process outlined by the Bridges Transition Model in response to the external and situational change introduced by superintendent turnover. The administrators in this inquiry first processed through the ending, loss, and letting go of their relationship with the outgoing superintendent on a personal and professional level during the announcement phase of superintendent transition, regardless of the how they characterized or valued the relationship. This was followed by a neutral zone experience, during the search phase, where there were high levels of uncertainty and anxiety, and yet some reported excitement for the possibilities that a change in leadership may bring about. Then, during the appointment phase, the administrators in this study expressed excitement and optimism toward the new leadership and the next phase of their district’s evolution. Finally, each participant experienced a new beginning with the installation of their new district leader with several reporting positive sentiments about the function and culture of the district-wide administrative team under their new superintendent. There was clear alignment between the phases of transition described in the Bridges Transition Model and the experiences of the participants during each of the phases of superintendent transition outlined in this study. Table 14 provides a visual representation of the
alignment between the Bridges Transition Model and the phases of superintendent transition defined in this study. Next, I analyze the key findings from this study through the combined application of Bolman and Deal’s (2017) Four-Frames Model and Forsyth et al.’s (2011) Collective Trust Model.

Table 4
Alignment of Bridges Transition Model and Phases of Superintendent Transition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BTM phases of transition</th>
<th>Endings</th>
<th>Neutral Zone</th>
<th>New Beginnings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Impact Radius</td>
<td>Announcement Phase</td>
<td>Search Phase</td>
<td>Appointment Phase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phases of superintendent transition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interpretation Through the Four-Frames and the Collective Trust Models

In this section, I examine the intersection between the four-frames model (Bolman & Deal, 2017) and the collective trust model (Forsyth et al., 2011) and how the key findings from this study can be understood through the intersection of the two models. First, I briefly reintroduce each model, then explore the nexus between these models, and then examine the key findings through a combined application of both theoretical models. I begin with the reintroduction of the four-frames model.

The four-frames model was developed to classify the primary mental models that influence leaders of organizations and impact not only their decision making, but also govern their interpersonal and professional interactions with stakeholders (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Since the story of any superintendent change involves a variety of leaders within a school district and school board, it is important to understand that each may be operating out of differing leadership frames as they navigate a decision-making process and the resulting consequences of their
involvement in any decision. In the process of developing this model, Bolman and Deal (2017), “sorted insights from both research and practice into four major frames – structural, human resources, political, and symbolic” (p. 16). The structural frame focuses on the architecture of organizations—the institutional infrastructure, groupings, rules, roles, goals, and policies. The human resources frame is centered on understanding your people/employees—their strengths, desires, emotions, and fears. Meanwhile, the political frame approaches organizations as competitive entities pursuing limited resources and competing interests, while engaged in a struggle for survival, power and advantage. Finally, the symbolic frame focuses on fostering meaning and faith, placing “ritual, ceremony, story, play, and culture at the heart of organizational life” (p. 23). The four-frames model allows for the analysis and understanding of what mental models and priorities may be influencing both the decision makers and their reactions to the outcomes of their decisions. In addition, determining the predominant operating frames of the outgoing superintendents in this study, and the impact of that preference was considered during the analysis of the key findings.

Forsyth et al.’s (2011) Collective Trust Model provides a framework for understanding and assessing the impact of superintendent change on a school district and the leaders who are responsible for leading through and after this change. These researchers started with a definition of trust that has been synthesized through their research and incorporates the key elements of the work of research and scholarship on defining trust. According to Forsyth et al. (2011), trust is “a state in which individuals and groups are willing to make themselves vulnerable to others and take risks with confidence that others will respond to their actions in positive ways, that is, with benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness” (pp. 19–20). Forsyth et al. asserted, “We want to make the case that in many organizations trust between groups plays a particularly
germane role in effective operation and goal achievement” (p. 20). In addition, they insisted collective trust is critical in organizations with highly interdependent groups who share tasks and work with high levels of complexity and uncertainty. Public school districts and district leadership teams certainly meet the organizational characteristics mentioned above, with highly interdependent groups of professionals who work with high levels of complexity and uncertainty.

Forsyth et al. (2011) argued, “There is empirical evidence that trust in the leader/supervisor has significant consequences for an organization’s productivity and effectiveness” (p. 157). Forsyth et al. defined collective trust as:

as a stable group property rooted in the shared perceptions and affect about the trustworthiness of another group or individual that emerges over time out of multiple social exchanges within the group. These socially constructed shared trust beliefs define the group’s willingness to be vulnerable to another group or individual. (p. 22)

The collective trust model provides a structure for assessing the level of, and factors that may be influencing, the collective trust in an organization. This theoretical framework was applied to the experiences of the administrators in this study and explained the emergence of the trust and distrust subgroups within this inquiry. Next, I explore where the four-frames model and the collective trust model intersect, before applying that intersectionality to the key findings in this study.

A Theoretical Nexus

Forsyth et al. (2011) provided a means for understanding how leadership influences outcomes and contended that cooperative behaviors in schools is the product of, or flows from, three sources of leadership influence. They explained a school or organizational leader draws from the following three leadership sources: Formal control, informal control, and collective
trust. Formal control relates to the establishment of roles, rules, policies, and procedures that are perceived to enable smooth and effective organizational operation. Informal control is the result of a leader’s ability to be influential and persuasive, while championing the district’s vision and mission in alignment with the collective values of the organization and community. The final source of leadership influence is collective trust, which is a leader’s ability to elicit and nurture faculty trust through behaving in trustworthy ways, by consistently modeling benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness.

The sources of leadership, identified by the collective trust model (Forsyth et al., 2011), align well with the four-frames model (Bolman & Deal, 2017). The structural frame focuses on the architecture of organizations by attending to the institutional infrastructure, groupings, rules, roles, goals, and policies. This aligns closely with the collective trust model’s first source of leadership—formal control. This source of leadership influence emanates from the establishment of roles, rules, policies, and procedures focused on enabling effective operations. There is similar alignment between the informal control source of leadership and the political frame. The political frame approaches organizations as competitive entities pursuing limited resources and competing interests, while engaged in a struggle for survival, power, and advantage. Relatedly, according to Forsyth et al. (2011), the informal control source of leadership influence centers on a leader’s ability to be influential and persuasive, while advancing the organization’s mission and vision and building support in the community around the values of the organization.

The final source of leadership influence identified by Forsyth et al. (2011) is collective trust. This source of leadership influence is the biproduct of a leader’s ability to cultivate trust with employee groups through their actions and interactions. Leading employees to feel valued, competent, and a sense of belonging within the organization, which promotes a commitment to
the success of the organization. If a leader or manager seeks to establish the collective trust source of leadership influence, they must be attentive to the central concepts of Bolman and Deal’s (2017) human resources and symbolic frames. The human resources frame prioritizes understanding your employees to include their strengths, desires, emotions, and fears. While the symbolic frame emphasizes the importance of developing a sense of meaning and faith within the organizational life of all employees through ritual, ceremony, story, play, and nurturing a positive organizational culture. There is tight alignment between the collective trust model’s sources of leadership influence and Bolman and Deal’s (2017) Four-Frames. Table 15 provides a visual representation of this alignment, which will be instructive in the analysis of the key findings in subsequent sections of this report.

Table 5
Alignment Between Four-Frames and Collective Trust Models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collective Trust Sources of Leadership</th>
<th>Alignment of Four-Frames and Collective Trust Models</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bolman &amp; Deals Four-Frames</td>
<td>Formal Control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Structural Frame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Informal Control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Political Frame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collective Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Human Resources Frame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Symbolic Frame</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally, the authors of both models encourage leaders to be familiar with and capable of operating out of multiple frames and sources of leadership influence. Bolman and Deal (2017) insisted, “each frame highlights significant possibilities for leadership, but each by itself is incomplete … ideally, managers combine multiple frames into a comprehensive approach to leadership” (pp. 356–357). Thompson’s (2000) findings reinforced this:
educational leaders who utilize three or four leadership frames … are perceived to be more effective in their leadership role. Thus, those who demonstrate the ability to encompass the cognitive complexity or use of multiple leadership frames associated with the ability to reconcile the competing demands of the working environment, yield a more effective leadership style than those who rely upon one or two leadership frames. (pp. 983–984)

Relatedly, Forsyth et al. (2011) contended, when a leader is attentive to and draws from each of these leadership sources, they are often rewarded with increased staff cooperation, which leads to organizational predictability and flexibility, and ultimately increases the effectiveness of the organization. Next, I explore the key findings from this study through the theoretical frameworks of the four-frames and collective trust models.

**Collective Trust and Trust/Distrust Subgroups**

Before proceeding with the analysis of the key findings, I present a clear connection to the collective trust model and the trust and distrust subgroups that emerged from the interview data in this study. Through the course of the interviews, each participant disclosed or referenced the level of personal or professional trust they and/or their peers had with the outgoing superintendent. Six participants described their relationship with the outgoing superintendent and the district culture under this leader as characterized by trust. Adrianna, for example, shared some sorrow of the retirement of her outgoing superintendent based on the trusting relationships and culture her former district leader had cultivated.

some sadness over losing (outgoing superintendent), especially with the trust that we had with her. So, I think that was sad, … We were in a good place with the trust amongst our admin team and so I think that was, it was hard, but yet we were exciting for her.
However, six other participants described their relationship with, and the organizational culture under, the former superintendent as characterized by distrust. Clara provided an example of this reflecting that, “the level of trust has declined in this district as a whole. … I think people just really want to return to more of a collaborative, trusting environment.”

After coding the interview data, the six participants who described an environment of trust existed under the leadership of their outgoing superintendent were identified as the trust subgroup, while the six respondents who reported a culture of distrust as a byproduct of the former superintendent’s leadership were identified as the distrust subgroup. In addition to the number of participants being equally distributed between the trust and distrust subgroups, the number of school districts represented by these participants were also equally distributed in each subgroup—there were six participants and three school districts represented in each subgroup.

Forsyth et al. (2011) developed the theory of collective trust, describing this phenomenon as an established set of group beliefs and shared perceptions of the trustworthiness of others and groups within an organization that emerges over time and out of multiple social exchanges within and between groups. They offered that collective trust differs from personal trust because it is not an individual cognitive construction, rather it is a social phenomenon constructed from recurring verbal and nonverbal interactions among group members and individuals. Forsyth et al. (2011) further explained, “out of multiple exchanges over time, a group consensus emerges producing socially constructed, shared, collective trust beliefs about another group or individual, which have important consequences (e.g., academic optimism, student achievement, and collective efficacy)” (p. 26). Similarly, when discussing or describing the level of trust that existed individually and systemically with their outgoing superintendent, the participants consistently described both personal and collective trust, as described by Forsyth et al. above.
The collective trust model provides a frame for understanding the emergence of the trust and distrust subgroups in this study as well as a theoretical description for retitling these subgroups. The participants clearly described both personal and collective trust when discussing trust relative to their outgoing superintendent in a manner consistent with the Forsyth et al.’s description of collective trust. As a result, the trust and distrust subgroups would be more appropriately titled or defined by their level of collective trust, such as the high or low collective trust subgroups. From this point forward in this study, the key findings will be amended to reflect this interpretation of the key findings through the application of the collective trust model. For example, key finding 1 states: The administrators in this study experienced curiosity, excitement, uncertainty, and anxiety, as well as a high frequency of dialogue, relative to superintendent turnover, with stakeholders throughout their interaction with the phenomenon of superintendent turnover. When there was distrust between the administrators and the outgoing superintendent each of these elements was intensified. The most immediate impact of interpretation of the key findings through the application of the collective trust model is to amend the last sentence of this finding to say: when there was low collective trust between administrators and the outgoing superintendent each of these elements were intensified. In addition, the trust subgroup will be retitled the high collective trust subgroup, while the distrust sub-group will be referred to as the low collective trust subgroup.

**Collective Trust Subgroups and the Four-Frames**

The interview data also revealed a connection between the collective trust subgroups and the outgoing superintendents perceived effective use of more than one of Bolman and Deal’s (2017) Four-Frames. The participants within the high collective trust subgroups provided examples that influenced their perception of the outgoing superintendent operating out of
multiple frames, and especially the human resources and/or symbolic frames. Adrianna, Blanca, and Estafania each reported high levels of personal and collective trust with their outgoing superintendent. While they provided examples, from their vantage point, of her operating effectively out of the political and structural frames, they each also gave examples of how their former district leader was attentive to the human resources frame. Adrianna saw her as a highly competent and valuable mentor, stating,

I think she's been really instrumental in my moves, from a dean of students to an assistant principal, to a principal in Suburban1. Really kind of serving as a mentor for me. Really encouraging me, … She often phrases it in thinking about things in terms of, you're ready for the next challenge. You're ready for the next step. Things that I might not have thought I was quite ready for. She has really given me that nudge.

Estafania shared, “I just wanted to learn from her. Having female mentors in secondary education is really important for me as it's more of a male dominated role at the secondary level. She was a strong woman but was very personable as well.” Blanca recalled, “another coordinator lost a husband from cancer. She was there at the hospital, bringing her pajamas, bringing her food, supporting her.” The outgoing superintendents in the Suburban1, Suburban3, and Rural6 school districts fostered collective trust and reportedly operated effectively out of the structural, political, and human resources or symbolic frames. As a result, several participants shared they maintained a relationship and contact with their former district leader after their retirement. Halina, for instance, stated, “we still communicate with each other, it was a very good relationship … we had a good professional relationship.” The connection between high collective trust and the outgoing superintendent’s perceived ability to effectively operate out of multiple leadership frames was evident in this study.
The respondents who comprised the low collective trust subgroup shared examples that reinforced their perception of their outgoing superintendent operating preferentially out of a single frame or ineffectively or inconsistently out of any single frame. Clara reported that her outgoing superintendent (Rural2 school district) operated primarily out of a structural frame, sharing that “His big thing was the Chain of command … he liked to remind us of that and that we needed to follow the chain of command, even when he did not do so himself.” She described the culture under his leadership with, “the culture he set is more of a fear-based, yeah. Rule-based, fear-based,” which she reported led to a climate of “protectionism” among the district leadership team resulting in higher levels of distrust and suspicion due to “the more self-serving nature of the superintendent.” Delfina similarly shared examples of the outgoing Rural2 superintendent operating primarily or preferentially out of the structural frame, while ignoring the political, human resources and symbolic frames. Geneva and Juan shared that, in their opinions, the outgoing Rural4 superintendent had an operational bias toward the political frame, but was ineffective operating out of that frame, at least when it came to passing bonds/referendums. Juan surmised:

I think a lot of it was trying to get a bond to go through and it didn't the couple times. It was just wearing, wearing, wearing to the point where, I think he just kind of got beat up enough where he was done.

And finally, both Ivan and Lucianna conveyed their perceptions that the outgoing Rural5 superintendent had not effectively operated out of any one frame with consistency, and it led to deep levels of distrust and division within the community. Both reporting that people either loved her or loved to see her go. Lucianna explained:
We were pretty split as a community, with some celebrating that we had another opportunity to try and turn the district around. They were pretty vocal about that on both sides, whether on social media or emails to principals, emails to board chair about either thanking them for making a good decision finally or expressing sadness.

The connection between low collective trust and the outgoing superintendent’s perceived inability to operate effectively out of multiple leadership frames was clear. Additionally, none of the outgoing superintendents of the low collective trust school districts (Rural2, Rural4, Rural5) were perceived as operating effectively or preferentially out of the human resources frame.

In this study, participants expressed a connection between collective trust and the outgoing superintendent’s perceived ability to operate out of multiple leadership frames. The former district leaders who were perceived to effectively utilize multiple leadership frames—structural, political, human resources, and symbolic—also fostered collective trust within their organizations (Suburban1, Suburban3, Rural6). While the outgoing superintendents who were not regarded as consistently or effectively able to employ one or more leadership frames were attributed with developing low collective trust within their school districts. Moreover, none of these district leaders were regarded as effective or consistent in their utilization of the human resources frame. Next, I further analyze the key findings through a combined application of the four-frames and collective trust models.

**Interpretation Through the Four-Frames and Collective Trust Models**

The following key findings were thoroughly explained and sourced in Chapter Four. I examine them through the four-frames and collective trust models. Each finding is explored through a combined application of these theoretical frameworks. I begin with key finding 1,
which reflects the findings related to the holistic or generalized participant experience with the phenomenon of superintendent turnover in its entirety.

**Key Finding 1:** Administrators experienced curiosity, excitement, uncertainty, and anxiety throughout the process. There appeared to be frequent discussion about the superintendents’ turnover. The discussion continued with stakeholders throughout their experience of superintendent turnover. When there was distrust between the administrators and the outgoing superintendent each of these elements was intensified.

The first half of this key finding was explained through the Bridges Transition model, earlier in the chapter, as reflective of individuals experiencing a change induced transition and processing through each phase of transition outlined in the Bridges Transition Model. The second part of this key finding aligns with the connections made in the previous section on the intersections between the four-frames and collective trust models. Forsyth et al. (2011) insisted there is evidence to support that trust in a leader significantly influences an organization's productivity and effectiveness. Relatedly, in this study when there was low collective trust in a school district the administrators, who had the responsibility to lead others through and after the phenomenon of superintendent turnover, conveyed heightened curiosity, excitement, uncertainty, and anxiety, while also, reporting significantly higher frequency of dialogue with stakeholder groups, relative to the superintendent transition, than the participants who had high collective trust with their outgoing superintendents. In addition, I established in the previous section that in this study the participants from school districts with low collective trust were also led by superintendents who were perceived to operate inconsistently or ineffectively out of a single leadership frame, and none were regarded as consistently effective in utilizing the human resources frame. This offers some understanding for why the low collective trust subgroup in this
study experienced each element of the transition with greater intensity, since the low collective trust in their districts was partially attributable to their outgoing superintendent’s perceived inability to operate effectively out of more than one leadership frame, and specifically the human resources frame. Next, I evaluate key finding 2, which focuses on the experience of the administrators in this study during the first phase of superintendent transition—the announcement phase.

**Key Finding 2:** The administrators experienced a variety of mixed emotions on a personal and professional level during the announcement phase of superintendent transition, ranging from excitement and curiosity to uncertainty and anxiety with the latter being the most commonly experienced. Administrators who reported distrust with the outgoing superintendent experienced a higher frequency of dialogue with stakeholders, relative to the change in the superintendency, and expressed feeling personal relief and excitement during the announcement phase. They welcomed change in the process of hiring a new superintendent.

While each of the administrators in this study experienced mixed emotions during the announcement phase of superintendent transition, there was a difference in the type and source of mixed emotions by participants depending on the level of collective trust reported. The administrators who comprised the high collective trust group reported their excitement and curiosity was relative to the possibility of extending the positive work and initiatives they engaged in under the outgoing superintendent’s leadership. Their anxiety extended from the uncertainty that they would continue to advance what they felt were meaningful initiatives and wondered if they would be able to be vulnerable with the new superintendent, like they had with their former district leader.
Meanwhile, the low collective trust participants expressed excitement and personal relief relative to the removal of what they felt was inhibiting the progress of the district, the outgoing superintendent. This is clearly articulated in the last sentence of this key finding. However, they also reported feeling anxiety and uncertainty about what the leadership experience would be like with a new superintendent. For example, while Lucianna was excited for the change in superintendency in Rural5 school district, she also expressed some apprehension, stating “I was more than a little nervous, since I knew how to navigate the former superintendent, but now I have no idea if it will be better or worse off with someone else.” Geneva shared that some of her peers were initially excited, then insecure.

Within the admin team, based on conversations, I think there was some self-doubt like, “Am I good enough?” … if a new superintendent comes in and says, “No, the bar is here.” … “I don't know that I can go there. I don't know that I can raise my bar to there. Can I perform at that level, and what if I can't?” was the tenor of some of the conversations I had with peers.

The collective trust model offers a frame for understanding how low levels of collective trust in an organization can breed both positive sentiments about the exodus of the outgoing superintendent while simultaneously producing high levels of anxiety for the pending installation of a new school district leader. Forsyth et al. (2011) posited that collective trust is collectively constructed through multiple shared experiences and influences what people feel about a person or group and how they expect to be treated by that person or group. The experiences that lead to the formation of low collective trust, also shape what people in organizations expect from other positions or people in the organization. This explains why the low collective trust administrators in this study experienced both excitement and anxiety during the announcement phase of
superintendent transition. The person who contributed to their lowered collective trust leaving produced feelings of personal relief; however, that feeling was replaced by anxiety over the uncertainty of whether or not they would have a different experience with the next district leader. Not surprisingly, the level of collective trust and the outgoing superintendent’s ability to operate out of multiple frames of leadership contributed to how the participants experienced the superintendent turnover in their current districts. The high collective trust subgroup was more willing to trust the outcome of the selection process would be positive, while the low collective trust subgroup vacillated between excitement and anxiousness. Next, I assess key finding 3, which focuses on the experience of the administrators in this study during the second phase of superintendent transition—the search/selection phase.

**Key Finding 3:** The search phase of superintendent transition was experienced negatively and with the highest frequency of dialogue with staff and administrative stakeholders, compared to other phases of transition. Administrators commonly desired transparency and involvement in the selection process and the hiring of a superintendent who is a collaborative, supportive, visible leader who is a candid communicator and willing to honor the values and programs that are considered central to the psyche of the school district.

The administrators in this study generally had a negative experience during the search phase of superintendent transition. While this was interpreted earlier in the chapter through the Bridges Transition Model, it was also partially attributable to the high frequency of dialogue they found themselves in with stakeholders throughout the search phase, coupled with frustration over a perceived lack of transparency or inclusion in the selection process. The combination of a high frequency of dialogue with stakeholders seeking information on the search and selection process
and feeling underinformed or uninvolved in the process contributed to the search phase negativity the administrators expressed.

In addition, several of the administrators in this study reported significant frustrations with elements of the school board selection process ranging from the timing, to a lack of transparency, to a disappointment over a lack of stakeholder involvement in the process. However, the participants felt they had to project positivity and optimism to other stakeholders, while being guarded about their personal feelings. Maintaining such a guarded public persona while processing through their own concerns, and anxieties as well as frustrations over a perceived lack of transparency in the selection process contributed to the search phase being experience negatively by the participants. In addition to the negative internal experience reported by participants, key finding 3 also reveals that administrators yearn for collective trust during and as a result of the superintendent search and selection process. Moreover, this key finding also indicates that the administrators hoped the search process would produce a new district leader who would operate out of multiple leadership frames.

Frustrations over a lack of transparency and/or involvement of stakeholders in the school board’s search and selection process was consistently reported by participants in this study, regardless of the level of collective trust that existed with the outgoing superintendent. The administrators in this study experienced an episode of low collective trust with their school boards, as a result of their school boards not operating out the collective trust source of leadership influence throughout the search and selection process. The search for and appointment of a superintendent is one of the most important jobs of a school board and it is a responsibility that was taken very seriously by each school board in this study, with five of the six districts hiring a search firm to assist with the process and provide guidance. Each participant understood
the responsibility of hiring a new superintendent rested solely on the school board. However, each participant expressed frustrations with a lack of transparency in the process and communications relative to the process.

Additionally, some participants expressed disappointment over a lack of stakeholder involvement, that contributed to an episodic experience of low collective trust with the school board. The expressed desire for transparency in process and communication as well as some level of involvement in the process is representative of the participants desire for a search and selection process that produces an experience of high collective trust. It was evident that the administrators in this study consciously, or otherwise, had unspoken expectations of transparency and involvement in the selection process that influenced the level of collective trust they experienced with the school board during the search phase of superintendent transition.

According to Forsyth et al. (2011), a leader, or school board, operating out of the collective trust source of leadership influence should contribute to staff feeling valued, competent, and provide a sense of belonging within the organization, which promotes a commitment to the success of the organization. A school board being attentive to how their actions and interactions contribute to a sense of high collective trust in the selection process may also contribute to the establishment of collective trust with the new district leader during the appointment and installation phases of superintendent transition.

The last part of key finding 3 is a clear expression of what the participants felt would support the establishment of collective trust with the new superintendent as well as a desire for the next superintendent to operate out of multiple leadership frames. Forsyth et al. (2011) explained that collective trust is the biproduct of a leader’s ability to cultivate trust with employee groups through their actions and interactions. This key finding articulates the actions
and interactions the participants in this study yearned for with a new superintendent: a superintendent who is a collaborative, supportive, visible leader who is a candid communicator and willing to honor the values and programs that are considered central to the psyche of the school district. Some participants desired this because they had experienced these attributes with their outgoing superintendent and others because the same actions and attributes were absent from their former superintendents’ leadership. In addition to this being a clear expression of the actions and interactions that would promote collective trust with a new district leader, this key finding makes it clear that these administrators yearn for a leader who utilizes multiple leadership frames. They desire a collaborative and supportive leader who values the ideas, insights, contributions, and development of other leaders and employees in the organization, which is a central focus of the human resources frame, according to Bolman and Deal (2017).

Additionally, to be supportive, a new leader needs to also have full command of the structural frame to organize or reorganize the human capital within the institution to allow other leaders to operate effectively and efficiently in service of the school districts mission and vision. When it comes to the desire for visibility, there are operational benefits for a superintendent to be visible and present in school buildings throughout the school district, as a result of them seeing first-hand how schools are operating and what transpires in district classrooms. However, this is also an expression of the desire for a superintendent who understands the political value of being physically present and visible in schools and classrooms, and how the understanding gained from high levels of visibility can increase a district leader’s political capital with staff stakeholder groups. Meanwhile, being a candid communicator aligns with Bolman and Deal’s (2017) political frame and the ability of a leader to be influential, but also aligns to the human resources frame in this case since the respondents desired this so that they could operate effectively with
other stakeholder groups. Forsyth et al. (2011) explained that trust in leadership is influenced by a “belief in the information provided by the leader” and leads to multiple positive organizational outcomes to include employee commitment to organizational decisions and vision, as well as job satisfaction. Candid communication enhances a superintendent’s political influence (political frame), while also supporting and respecting the needs of the middle level leaders within the organization, which aligns with the human resources frame.

Finally, the administrators in this study were hopeful that the new district leader would honor the values and programs that are considered central to the psyche of the school district. The symbolic frame emphasizes the importance of developing a sense of meaning and faith within the organizational life of all employees and nurturing a positive organizational culture. The last element of key finding 3 reflects a desire that the new superintendent operate out of the symbolic frame while recognizing the work, commitment, and investments of time and resources that preceded their appointment. Each participant was excited by the possibility to improve or enhance the work and influence of the school district on student development and the fresh perspectives a new superintendent could bring but were hopeful the new district leader would find a way to infuse new direction and programming with some of the valued ongoing initiatives and programing of the school district. This would require the next superintendent to operate out of the symbolic frame. Key finding 3 aligns closely with both the four-frames and collective trust models and reinforces the importance of collective trust and leadership that utilized multiple leadership frames. Next, I explore key finding 4, which focuses on the experience of the administrators in this study during the third phase of superintendent transition—the appointment phase.
**Key Finding 4:** The administrators experienced excitement and optimism during the appointment phase of superintendent transition and desired an organizational culture of collaboration under the newly appointed superintendent.

The administrators in this study worked through a superintendent transition and their levels of trust were inevitably influenced by their experiences with the outgoing superintendent and the organizational, social, and professional climate established by that leader. It was evident that the high collective trust and low collective trust subgroups in this study arrived at the sentiments and aspirations found in key finding 4 by differing paths. Forsyth et al. (2011) provided the following definition for collective trust:

Formally, we define collective trust as a stable group property rooted in the shared perceptions and affect about the trustworthiness of another group or individual that emerges over time out of multiple social exchanges within the group. These socially constructed shared trust beliefs define the group’s willingness to be vulnerable to another group or individual. (p. 22)

The high collective trust and low collective trust subgroups had arrived at their collective trust levels based on multiple personal, professional, and collective interactions with their former outgoing superintendents, that influenced their determinations about trustworthiness of this leader and their willingness to be vulnerable with them. The participants who had experienced high levels of collective trust with their outgoing superintendent wondered if they could be as vulnerable with the next superintendent as they had been with the previous but were generally excited and optimistic about the possibilities because they were coming out of a positive experience with their former district leader. Their interactions with the newly appointed superintendent throughout the appointment phase, while this new leader was visiting and
learning about their new school district but not yet officially on the job, reinforced their openness to the belief that collective trust would continue under the leadership of the next superintendent.

Conversely, the low collective trust subgroup was generally excited and optimistic that they may experience what was absent from the leadership of their outgoing superintendents. At the appointment of the new superintendent, they were nervous but generally optimistic that their organizational life was going to be more positive and productive. Despite not experiencing collective trust under the outgoing superintendent, these participants had some hope and belief, based on the search and selection process and interactions throughout the appointment phase, that the newly appointed superintendent had the attributes and capacity to develop collective trust in the organization. In both collective trust circumstances, the participants were influenced by their past experiences and optimistic about the establishment of collective trust with their new district leader, albeit for differing reasons. Finally, I examine key finding 5, which focuses on the experience of the administrators in this study during the fourth phase of superintendent transition—the installment phase.

**Key Finding 5:** The administrators sought to establish trust in their relationship with the new district leader, during the installation phase of superintendent transition, while primarily focused on developing answers to the following questions: a) will you be the leader we thought you would be? and b) do you care about my growth as a leader and learner as well as improving student outcomes?

The installation phase key finding provided additional examples of alignment with the four-frames and collective trust models. The first part of this key finding represents a clear expression of participants yearning for the establishment of collective trust with their new district leader. However, the second half of this key finding provides the conscious or unconscious
contingencies the participants had for the development of collective trust with their new superintendent. According to the administrators in this study, their willingness to be vulnerable with the new superintendent, which is a key element of collective trust, was connected to what they determined, through observation and interactions, were the answers to the following questions: a) will you be the leader we thought you would be? and b) do you care about my growth as a leader and learner as well as improving student outcomes? The first question aims to assess whether or not the participants and other stakeholders can trust that the new superintendent will be the same leader in practice that they espoused they would be during the search and selection process. Will this new leader fulfill the “campaign promises” that were heard or inferred during the selection process? Interestingly, much of the inferred or anticipated beliefs about the new district leader resulted from informal vetting of the candidates by stakeholders through internet and social network information gathering. Regardless of what was heard or inferred, the participants wanted to know if the structural, human resources, symbolic and political overtures made or inferred during the selection process will accurately represent organizational life under this new district leader.

The second question focuses specifically on the human resources frame. The human resources frame prioritizes understanding your employees to include their strengths, desires, emotions, and fears. The participants wanted to know that their work would be meaningful and that the new district leader would value and invest in them as they do the same with their staff and students. Inherently, this is also a question of vulnerability, since the development of another person is contingent upon knowing their strengths and areas of growth and then designing meaningful work and learning that enhances both. If a colleague determines they cannot be vulnerable with a new leader, then a leader is left to divine or guess the best way to
develop that employee. Both of the questions in key finding 5 represent trust and human resource frame filters that have to be consciously or otherwise informed for the administrators to continue on a journey toward collective trust with their new superintendents. Each of the key findings had overt connections to and were explained by the four-frames and collective trust models in the preceding sections. Next, I provide a chapter summary before moving on to the summary, ramifications, and implications of this study as well as ideas for future inquiries in Chapter Six.

**Chapter Summary**

I started this chapter with an analysis of the key findings through the application of the Bridges Transition Model (Bridges, 2016) and found significant correlation between the experiences of the administrators in this study during the phases of superintendent transition, defined in this study, and the Bridges Transition Model. The process and timeline most school districts follow when experiencing turnover in the superintendency affords educators, especially administrators, time to process through the internal and psychological transition process outlined by the Bridges Transition model, in response to the external and situational change introduced by superintendent turnover. The administrators in this inquiry first processed through the ending, loss, and letting go of their relationship with the outgoing superintendent on a personal and professional level during the announcement phase of superintendent transition, regardless of how they characterized or valued the relationship. This was followed by a neutral zone experience, during the search phase, where there were high levels of uncertainty and anxiety, and yet some reported excitement for the possibilities that a change in leadership may bring about. Then, during the appointment phase, the administrators in this study expressed excitement and optimism toward the new leadership and the next phase of their district’s evolution. Finally, each participant experienced a new beginning with the installation of their new district leader with
several reporting positive sentiments about the function and culture of the district-wide administrative team under their new superintendent. There was clear alignment between the phases of transition described in the Bridges Transition Model and the experiences of the participants during each of the phases of superintendent transition outlined in this study.

Before analyzing the key findings through a combined application of the four-frames (Bolman & Deal, 2017) and collective trust model (Forsyth et al., 2011), the intersectionality of these models was explored and explained. The models were found to have significant alignment and the key findings reinforced this alignment. First the Bolman and Deal (2017) Four-Frames—structural, political, human resources, and symbolic—were found to align closely with the collective trust model’s (Forsyth et al., 2011) sources of leadership influence—formal control, informal control, and collective trust. The structural frame and the formal control source of leadership influence both focus on the roles, rules, goals, policies, and operations of an organization. The political frame and the informal control source of leadership centers on a leader’s ability to be influential and persuasive, while advancing the organizations mission and vision and building support in the community around the values of the organization. Meanwhile, the human resources and symbolic frame aligned well with the collective trust source of leadership influence focusing on the assets employees offer the organization and harnessing their skills and capacity to serve and advance the mission and vision. Both frames and the collective trust source of leadership prioritize leading employees to feel valued, competent, and a sense of belonging within the organization, which promotes a commitment to the success of the organization. In addition to the alignment between the four-frames and the sources of leadership influence, the authors of both models promote the importance and value of a leader understanding and being able to operate out of multiple frames and sources of leadership.
influence. Before interpreting the key findings through the intersections between the four-frames and collective trust models, the emergence of trust and distrust subgroups was explained through the collective trust model and determined that a better theoretical description of these groups is to refer to them relative to the level of collective trust they experienced with their outgoing superintendent. Therefore, the trust subgroup was retitled the high collective trust subgroup, while the distrust subgroup is referred to as the low collective trust subgroup.

I also found there was an identified connection between collective trust and the outgoing superintendent’s perceived ability to operate out of multiple leadership frames. The former district leaders who were considered effective at utilizing multiple leadership frames—structural, political, human resources, and symbolic—also fostered collective trust within their organizations (Suburban1, Suburban3, Rural6). Conversely, the outgoing superintendents who were perceived to inconsistently or ineffectively employ one or more leadership frame were attributed with developing low collective trust within their school districts. Moreover, none of these district leaders were reportedly regarded as effective or consistent in their utilization of the human resources frame.

The analysis of the key findings reinforced the connections made above, and the importance and impact of a superintendent’s perceived ability to utilize multiple frames and sources of leadership. The key finding revealed the administrators in this study yearn for collective trust in their relationship with their superintendent, which was significantly impacted by that leader’s perceived ability to operate out of multiple frames and with multiple sources of leadership influence. The participants experiences and emotions during each phase of superintendent transition were intensified when there was low collective trust with their outgoing superintendent. It was evident that the participants not only desire collective trust with their
district leader, but also hope to experience a sense of collective trust with the school board during the search and selection process while hiring a new superintendent.

Transparency in communication and process during the search phase, along with clarity on how stakeholders can interact with the selection process were identified as factors that would have contributed to a sense of collective trust with the school board during this phase of superintendent transition. Meanwhile, during the appointment phase of superintendent transition the administrators in this study yearned for and were optimistic about the possibility of establishing collective trust with their new district leader regardless of the level of collective trust they had with their former superintendent. Additionally, they unknowingly expressed a desire for a new superintendent who could operate out of multiple frames and sources of leadership influence, when listing the attributes they desired for in their new district leader. This continued into the installation phase of superintendent transition which extended from the date the new district leader officially began functioning as the superintendent through their first year in this role with their new school district.

During this phase of superintendent transition, the administrators in this study were eager to establish collective trust with their new district leader but felt this was contingent upon two key factors. First, the participants wanted to know that their new district leader would be the type of leader they felt was presented to them, and they got excited about during the search and appointment phases. The anticipatory expectations about the new superintendent’s leadership were constructed by what stakeholders had heard and experienced in their interactions with the superintendent candidate and appointee as well as what they inferred through internet and social network inquiries, during the search and appointment phases. The second factor that reportedly contributed to the establishment of collective trust during the installation phase for the
participants in this study was whether or not the new superintendent could effectively operate out of the human resources frame while investing in the growth and development of the next level of administration within the school district. The administrators in this study consistently reported and appreciated the learning focus their new district leader instilled within the district administrative team. This contributed to the administrators’ willingness to be vulnerable with their new superintendents, which contributed to the establishment of collective trust. In the next chapter, I further summarize this study and provide implications and recommendations based on this inquiry.
CHAPTER SIX: SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This inquiry sought to uncover how principals in small, single high school, school districts experience the phenomenon of superintendent turnover through the following research question: How do principals in single high school, school districts, with enrollments less than 8750 students, experience the phenomenon of superintendent turnover, and how are they impacted by this change. I selected the title impact radius to describe the sphere of influence a superintendent has in a small, single high school, school district on district and school administrators and the resulting impact turnover in the superintendency has on these leaders. The findings in this phenomenological study were analyzed through the lenses of the Bridges Transition Model (Bridges, 2016), the four-frame model (Bolman & Deal, 2017), and the collective trust model (Forsyth et al., 2011). This inquiry illuminated how principals navigate change in the superintendency, while providing insights for how school boards and superintendents might support principals through a change in superintendency. In addition, this study provides observations for acting and aspiring superintendents to consider how they can shape the organizational climate and culture of a school district. In this chapter, I explore the implications and recommendations that emerged from this inquiry and conclude with a discussion of the limitations of this study and recommendations for future research.

Implications

The findings of this inquiry inspired the following implications for educational leaders to consider as they develop their own leadership paradigms. While these implications can be considered independently, it is recommended that educational leaders reflect on the interconnectedness of each implication to maximize the reflective and anticipatory benefit they
offer. I discuss each independently here, while encouraging the reader to simultaneously consider the interdependent nature of these implications.

a) Building and district administrators are a primary access point for stakeholders attempting to gain insights about the superintendent search and selection process, as well as perspective on prospective candidates during superintendent turnover.

b) Transparency in the school board’s search and selection process and communication during superintendent turnover can significantly influence the building and district administrator experience and the establishment of trust with the school board and the incoming superintendent.

c) Administrators desire a collaborative and trusting relationship with their superintendent, that promotes professional growth and allows for vulnerability.

d) Establishing collective trust within the organization is one of the most important leadership functions of a new superintendent from the time of their appointment through their early installation period—the first year on the job—as a new district leader.

e) A superintendent’s perceived understanding of, and ability to utilize multiple leadership frames and sources of influence is critically influential in the establishment of collective trust and their overall success as a district leader.

f) Higher levels of collective trust in an organization may diminish staff and stakeholder anxiety and fear during episodes of transition.
Implication A – Administrators are a Primary Information Access Point

Building and district administrators are a primary access point for stakeholders attempting to gain insights about the superintendent search and selection process, as well as perspectives on prospective candidates during superintendent turnover.

The administrators in this study experienced a high frequency of dialogue with stakeholders throughout the first three phases of superintendent transition—announcement, search, and appointment phases—reporting hourly to weekly conversations on the average with their staff and administrative peers. They also reported experiencing internal pressure to be self-regulated during many of these interactions because they felt that during many of these interactions, stakeholders were scrutinizing their responses as a means of evaluating their own feelings. School district stakeholders have fairly direct and frequent, if not daily, access to their building administrators, especially in smaller school districts. In addition to ease of access to building administrators, stakeholders often have more of an established relationship with their school’s principal, than they do with school board members or the outgoing superintendent. During the uncertainty and curiosity of the first three phases of superintendent transition, building and district administrators proved to be the primary information access point for many stakeholders in the school districts represented in this study.

Implication B – Transparency Promotes Trust

Transparency in a school board’s search and selection process and communication during superintendent turnover can significantly influence the building and district administrator experience and the establishment of trust with the school board and the incoming superintendent.
In this study, the search phase was described by participants in terms that were either overtly negative or had clear negative connotations. Most of the participants at least partially attributed this to frustration with elements of the search and selection process utilized by their school boards. While recognizing the responsibility of hiring the new superintendent was solely the responsibility of the school board, each participant had concerns with either a lack of transparency in the process of hiring the new superintendent or communications during the search phase. When considered alongside the first implication, this put the administrators in this study in a tenuous situation as they experienced a high frequency of dialogue with stakeholders relative to superintendent turnover, while feeling they were being vetted for information by other stakeholders. In some instances, it also impacted their perceived trust with the school board and the process, and some participants reported having to work through lingering doubts about the new superintendent hire during the early installation period. The related findings that support this implication were not correlated to the level of trust the participants had with the outgoing superintendent. The desire for transparency in process and communication during the search and selection process, and frustration over the absence of it, was consistently reported regardless of the levels of collective trust with the outgoing superintendent described by participants.

**Implication C – Collaboration and Trust Promotes Growth**

Administrators desire a collaborative and trusting relationship with their superintendent that promotes professional growth and allows for vulnerability.

It was evident in this study that the administrators desired a trusting and collaborative relationship with their district leader. Those who had such a relationship with their former superintendent were hopeful they would establish a similar relationship with their new leader, allowing them to be equally vulnerable and candid with the new superintendent. While those
who had not had a trusting and collaborative relationship with their outgoing superintendent hoped those characteristics would be present in their relationship with their new district leader. In addition, many of the participants reported excitement over the initial indications that they were developing a learning focused, collaborative culture with their new superintendent. The administrators who experienced this during the installation phase were excited and engaged by this element of their new superintendent’s leadership despite the added work expected of them as lead learners in their school districts.

**Implication D – Establishing Collective Trust is the Job**

Establishing Collective Trust within the organization is one of the most important leadership functions of a new superintendent from the time of their appointment through their early installation period—the first year on the job—as a new district leader.

The previous implication indicates the administrators in this study were eager to establish a trusting and collaborative relationship with their new superintendent, which is a foundational element of establishing collective trust with colleagues. The existence of collective trust in an organization is a precondition that promotes educator and educational leader risk taking and willingness to be vulnerable. Forsyth et al. (2011) contended when collective trust is present in a social network, communication and psychological safety are enhanced, providing a leader with the social capital to lead reform efforts. They insisted,

Collective trust … facilitates cooperative interactions across role boundaries and unites individuals around a common vision. Both effects need to be leveraged in order to achieve the level of reform necessary to make schools responsive to the changing needs of a global and information-based society. (Forsyth et al., 2011, p. 130)
The experiences of the administrators in this study reinforced this and key finding 5 provided the unspoken filters the administrators in this study used to assess the establishment of collective trust during the installation phase. Regardless of the level of trust the participants had with their outgoing superintendent they desired it in their relationship with their new leader and wanted their energy to be focused on advancing the district vision, not navigating an organizational culture inhibited by low collective trust.

**Implication E – Multiplicity Matters**

A superintendent’s perceived understanding of, and ability to utilize multiple leadership frames and sources of influence is critically influential in the establishment of collective trust and their overall success as a district leader.

In this study, there was a correlation between high collective trust and the outgoing superintendent’s perceived ability to operate out of multiple leadership frames, described in the four-frames model (Bolman & Deal, 2017) and with multiple sources of leadership influence, as defined by the collective trust model (Forsyth et al., 2011). The former district leaders who were considered to effectively utilize multiple leadership frames—structural, political, human resources, and symbolic—also fostered collective trust within their organizations (Suburban1, Suburban3, Rural6) while employing each of the sources of leadership influence—formal control, informal control, and collective trust. Conversely, the outgoing superintendents who were perceived to inconsistently or ineffectively utilize one or more leadership frame or source of leadership influence were attributed with developing low collective trust within their school districts (Rural2, Rural4, Rural5). Moreover, the participants from these districts also reported that change was welcome if not overdue and that they were experiencing stagnant or retrograde student performance. Forsyth et al. (2011) argued, “There is empirical evidence that trust in the
leader/supervisor has significant consequences for an organization's productivity and effectiveness” (p. 157). The experience of the administrators in this study supported this either through affirmation or absence. The districts represented in this study by participants who reported high collective trust experienced professional and programmatic progress and success. Meanwhile, those who characterized their district’s organizational culture and their relationship with the outgoing superintendent with low collective trust did not consistently express or report experiencing district-wide programmatic or performance successes. This reinforced the importance of a superintendent being attentive to the establishment of collective trust and understanding that this is connected to their perceived ability to operate out of multiple leadership frames and sources of leadership.

**Implication F – Collective Trust Diminishes Transition Anxiety**

Higher levels of collective trust in an organization may diminish staff and stakeholder anxiety and fear during episodes of transition.

Finally, as outlined in the previous implications, superintendents who are attentive to and adroitly operate out of multiple leadership frames (structural, political, human resources, and symbolic) and sources of leadership influence (formal control, informal control, and collective trust) foster higher levels of collective trust within and in the school district. When outgoing superintendents and school boards invest in creating the organizational conditions that nurture higher levels of collective trust many stakeholders have faith in the established climate and culture of the school district and anticipate change in the superintendency with lower levels of anxiety or fear. In other words, a superintendent who attends to building collective trust through thoughtful engagement with the four-frames and collective trust models can insulate staff and community stakeholders from the negative anticipatory effects of turnover at the top. While all
stakeholders must process through the phases of transition outlined in the Bridges Transition Model (endings and letting go, the neutral zone, a new beginning), when they engage with the transition process having experienced collective trust with the outgoing superintendent and the school board, the emotions that accompany each phase of transition may be less intense based on their previous experience with high collective trust and the belief that it is replicable with the next district leader.

**Recommendations**

The recommendations I provide next pertain to the implications of this study and are intended to guide the reflection and practice of acting or aspiring superintendents and school board members, as well as educational leaders tasked with leading through organizational change. The Bridges Transition, four-frames, and collective trust models can be leveraged to enhance the impact a superintendent has on a school district, and the residual effect of their leadership. Meanwhile, some of the recommendations provide strategies or steps for effectively supporting district stakeholders through the internal and psychological transition process that must accompany the external and situational change produced by superintendent turnover. To that end, the following recommendations are presented for consideration.

**Understand and Embrace Multiplicity**

Superintendents and leaders should be familiar with each of Bolman and Deal’s (2017) four leadership frames and the sources of leadership influence defined in Forsyth et al.’s (2011) Collective Trust Model. Each of the leadership frames and sources of leadership can be powerfully influential in advancing the work of school and district leadership, when applied purposefully to the appropriate circumstances or challenges. School leaders and superintendents should be aware of and able to harness the power of each frame as they lead the work of meeting
the competing interests in public education and school districts. Moreover, superintendents and leaders should fluidly engage multiple frames and sources of leadership in their work with stakeholders as a means of increasing collective trust both in and within the school district. The ability to leverage each of the Four Frames can diminish leadership blind spots and enhance collective trust. Some situations may require a leader to operate out of multiple leadership frames and sources of leadership influence simultaneously in order to meet the divergent needs presented by the circumstances and individuals involved. When a superintendent purposefully and skillfully engages multiple frames and sources of leadership, they contribute to the development of collective trust and the impact radius of their leadership is expanded.

**Purposefully Foster Collective Trust**

Superintendents and educational leaders should nurture high levels of collective trust to better prepare their colleagues for transitions in leadership. Considering the average tenure for superintendents in the state of Minnesota is 5.75 years (Gundlach, 2016) and is between 5-6 nationally (Glass et al., 2000), the probability of principals in small school districts experiencing a change in the superintendent position is significant. One method of preparing colleagues and stakeholders for inevitable change in the highest leadership office in a school district, is for superintendents to foster higher levels of collective trust within the district and with the community relative to the school district. Collective trust is heightened when leaders artfully operate out of multiple leadership frames and sources of leadership influence while being particularly attentive to the human resources frame and the collective trust source of leadership.
influence. Both focus on knowing the strength and developmental needs of your colleagues and engaging these purposefully to advance the district’s mission and vision. Higher levels of collective trust can support stakeholders through a leadership transition, since it promotes trust and a belief in the trustworthiness and benevolence of the position of superintendent. Which, in turn, allows stakeholders tasked with leading through superintendent turnover to be vulnerable and invest faith in the selection process and the overall wellness of the district. Forsyth et al. (2011) considered collective trust as a productivity multiplier, stating “trust in leadership has multiple significant and positive outcomes, including its ability to elicit from employees altruism, civic virtue, conscientiousness, courtesy, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, belief in information provided by the leader and commitment to decisions” (p. 117). Therefore, a commitment to the development of collective trust by a superintendent increases the impact radius of their leadership both while they are leading an organization and throughout the transition process to a new leader.

**Develop and Communicate a Transition Plan for Administrators**

This recommendation was inspired by participant Deflina’s reflection on the transition process in her district and was reinforced by other participants’ thoughts during the interviews. Delfina suggested that had her superintendent provided her and fellow administrators with a transition plan and ways they could support the new district leader, based on the insights and experience of the outgoing superintendent, she would have felt more involved in the process. This would have provided clarity and inclusion for her and allowed her to focus on how she
could contribute to supporting and advancing the work of the school district during the transition to a new superintendent. This approach allows administrators to engage in the transition process with greater purpose and a sense of control, as they prepare and develop how they can operate in service of this administrative transition support plan. Providing a transition plan with articulated roles for district and building administrators also contributes to the development of collective trust in the process by providing each leader with a point of contribution in the process and onboarding of the new superintendent.

**Transparency in the Search and Selection Process and Communications**

The impact of a lack of transparency in the search and selection process and communications has been thoroughly examined in this study and can be summarized as factor that diminishes collective trust with the school board and faith in the appointment of the new district leader. A school board is not obligated to operate with a high level of transparency while performing one of their most critical functions, the hiring of the superintendent. However, based on the experience of the administrators in this study, it would be wise from a political, human resources, and symbolic frame for a school board to operate with appropriate levels of transparency in the selection process and communications. The administrators in this study, regardless of the level of collective trust reported, consistently expressed frustration with a lack of transparency and opportunities for engagement with the selection process. None of the participants expressed an expectation to be on the hiring committee, but they consistently shared disappointment over not having opportunities to be more engaged or informed about the candidates and process. Since building and district leaders are a primary informational access point for many district stakeholders, it is beneficial for the school board to provide clear and timely communications and opportunities for these critical influencers to be and feel adequately
informed about the search and selection process. This also adds to the collective trust between the school and district administrators and the school board, which as stated previously has multiple positive implications on the climate and productivity of the organization. While there is no obligation for school boards to be transparent in the superintendent selection process, the benefits of doing so far outweigh the costs.

**Know the New Superintendent Cheat Code**

I became familiar with the term cheat code when my son was a teenager, and I watched him play video games. He informed me that video game developers often build in cheat codes into the architecture of a video game’s coding, which allow the player to access performance or visual enhancements during gameplay. Since then, as a high school principal, I hear students use this reference to any method that allows for a user workaround that simplifies progress or performance. Key finding 5 provides one such cheat code for aspiring or newly hired superintendents. The administrators in this study collectively articulated the conscious or semi-conscious filters they use to determine if they will continue on a trust journey with their new superintendent, one that leads to operating with candor and vulnerability with this new leader. The questions that these administrators sought answers for during the installation phase were: a) will you be the leader we thought you would be? and b) do you care about my growth as a leader and learner as well as improving student outcomes? Armed with the understanding that building and district administrators yearn for a supportive and collaborative relationship with their superintendent and assess the development of this by seeking answers to the preceding questions, new superintendents can purposefully operate in service of those questions to accelerate the development of collective trust.
New superintendents should conduct themselves in a manner that is consistent with what they espoused to be during the search and selection process, especially if that was a collaborative, supportive, visible leader who is a candid communicator. Secondly, a new leader who prioritizes the professional learning and development of the educators in the system while challenging the status quo to ensure students experience success also accelerates the development of collective trust with building and district leaders based on the findings of this study. In conclusion, one collective trust cheat code for newly appointed superintendents or educational leaders is to a) operate consistently with what was portrayed about your leadership and vision during the selection process and b) prioritize the growth and development of your educators and your students, knowing that they are inseparably and symbiotically connected. This may be the impact radius multiplier cheat code.

**Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research**

This study focused on the impact of superintendent turnover on the next layer of leadership in a small, single high school, school district. This inquiry was narrowed to focus on how principals in small districts experience the phenomenon of change in the superintendency based on reflections from my experience in both a large urban school district and small suburban school districts. I have perceived the development of a more professionally and personally intimate relationship existing commonly between the superintendent and building principals in the small school districts I have worked in, and in a manner that was not evident to me as a teacher and administrator in the large urban district where I started my career. Therefore, I titled this inquiry Impact Radius and chose to study principals in small, single high school, school districts as they reflected on how they experienced the phenomenon of superintendent turnover. This study could, and probably should, be recreated with principals in large districts to determine
if there is commonality in how administrators experience superintendent turnover, both amongst their peers in large districts as well as with the experience of their colleagues in smaller school districts. Such a study might further explore how the economies of scale and the size of bureaucracy in large districts influence the job of leading a school community through a transition in the superintendency compares with how the same responsibility is experienced by administrators in smaller school districts.

Additionally, while I was able to solicit 12 participants from two suburban and four rural midwestern school districts within a 100-mile radius of the metropolitan area I reside in, this study could be expanded to include more participants and an even broader geographical area. This would allow for the study to evaluate if the same experiential themes and findings would be present within other regions of this midwestern state and within other community and institutional settings. In addition, some of the frequency trends I had planned to examine in this study to determine if there were correlations between these factors and the level of collective trust reported by participants, may have been more assessable.

In this study, once the frequency of dialogue data was compiled into tables, I intended to explore if there were observable trends in the data such as a connection between the frequency of dialogue and reported trust or distrust with the outgoing superintendent. Connections between frequency of dialogue participant averages and a) the voluntary versus involuntary separation of the outgoing superintendent, and b) rural versus suburban subgroup trends were not able to be discretely assessed in this study because of an unanticipated alignment between the representation of participants in each of these subgroups. Unexpectedly, the three school districts (Rural2, Rural4, and Rural5) represented by participants who reported distrust with their outgoing superintendents were the same respondents/districts with reported involuntary
separations between the outgoing superintendent and the school district. While there may appear to be a connection between the factors of distrust and involuntary separation in this study, the sample size is not large enough to infer that such a connection would exist beyond this study.

The subgroup trend of rural versus suburban was also inconclusive. Three of the four rural school districts represented in this study reported distrust and an involuntary separation of their outgoing superintendent. Meanwhile, the participants representing Suburban1, Suburban3 and Rural6 school districts reported a high level of collective trust and a voluntary separation of their retiring superintendent. However, Klaus was the sole representative of Rural6 and he was only in his position, in that district, during the installation phase of superintendent transition, and no significant differences in frequency of dialogue participant averages were found in the fourth phase of transition. As a result, during the first three phases of transition there was no representative difference between the trust and suburban subgroups or between the distrust and rural subgroups. In this study, it could not be determined if the alignment of the participants in the trust and suburban subgroups, as well as the distrust and rural subgroups was coincidental or causal and therefore no connection was assessed, resulting in the rural versus suburban trend also going unassessed.

Additionally, I also intended to assess if there were any discernable subgroups trends based on the school level served by the participants—elementary, middle school, high school, district level administrator. In this study there were three elementary, three middle school, three high school, one middle/high school, and two district-level administrators. However, two high school principals were not with their districts in phases one through three, and one middle school principal was not with their district during phase four. While the participant averages were calculated along with the other subgroup trends, the low sample size for each the school level...
subgroups led to the determination that the sample sizes were too small to confidently consider a connection between school level served by the administrator and frequency of dialogue they experienced during each phase of superintendent transition.

A larger subject sample size and geographic range may have increased the likelihood of exploring possible connections or trends between the level of collective trust with the outgoing superintendent and a) the type of superintendent separation (voluntary vs involuntary), or b) the school community setting (rural vs suburban), and finally c) the level of school served by the participant (elementary, middle school, or high school). I was disappointed when I determined these trust trends would go unexplored in this study due to unanticipated alignment between participants and districts along these trend fault lines. The inclusion of large and small school districts in a future study may also allow for these trust trends to be assessed.

Finally, I also wonder what the ramifications on the findings of this study would be if it had been conducted in a state that does not have negotiated teacher and administrative contracts—a “right to work” or non-union state—or a state in a different region of the country. While I have done some professional development and collaboration with colleagues from other states, I have never been employed as an educator outside of my midwestern state. It is easy to assume commonality of experience based on titles, but I am not sure that is always accurate. I would be curious what the finding might be if this study were conducted outside of the Midwestern region of the United States, and in a right to work state.
REFERENCES


Bridges, W., & Bridges, S. (2020). *Bridges transition model*. Wmbridges.com

https://wmbridges.com/resources/transition-management-articles/


Laffe, S. (2014). In career terms, bigger doesn't mean better. *School Administrator, 71*(9), 36.


[https://medium.com/redbubble/personal-growth-to-impact-others-dde0e034a805](https://medium.com/redbubble/personal-growth-to-impact-others-dde0e034a805)


[https://scholarship.shu.edu/dissertations/2254/](https://scholarship.shu.edu/dissertations/2254/)


[https://wmbridges.com/about/what-is-transition](https://wmbridges.com/about/what-is-transition)
APPENDICES
Appendix A: Invitation to Participants

**Initial correspondence via email: Research request for your insights**

I am reaching out to ask for your assistance and involvement in a research study that seeks to understand how Principals and district leaders in single high school, school districts in Minnesota experience superintendent turnover. I am a high school Principal, and a Doctoral student at the University of St. Thomas, and very interested in your input in this phenomenological study, because you are a school or district administrator in a Minnesota school district with a single high school that is or will be experiencing change in superintendency. While the research predicts higher rates of Superintendent change in smaller school districts, the literature is almost silent on the impact of Superintendent turnover on the next layer of leadership in school districts.

If you agree to be involved in this study, I would ask you to participate in a 45-60 minute interview, with the possibility of follow up correspondences, via phone or email. Our conversations and your answers will be confidential, and you may refuse to answer any questions or discontinue your involvement in this study at any time. Only the researcher will have access to the interview data. The information you provide will be reported in aggregate. Your name and that of your district will be kept strictly confidential. No identifying details will be disclosed nor will direct quotes be attributed to an individual or district. Therefore, there are no anticipated personal or professional risks associated with involvement in this study.

If you are willing to participate, please reply to this email expressing your interest and I will reach out to you to set up a time and location in your community for us to meet to conduct the interview. Your perspectives and experiences are pivotal to this research. I would be honored to have an opportunity to sit with you and discuss the how you process and experience superintendent turnover. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Regards,

**Matthew Boucher**

University of St. Thomas Doctoral Candidate  
Meboucher@stthomas.edu  
(763)600-5101

**Follow-up correspondence:**

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study, I am honored to have the opportunity to capture your thoughts and experiences as you process through the turnover in your districts Superintendency. I would like to set up a time when we could meet so I can interview you about this experience. I will come to you, so I am wondering what your availability looks like over the next couple of weeks, and if there a place that you would be most comfortable meeting for this interview?
Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

Impact Radius: How principals in small school districts experience turnover in the Superintendent position. (IRB.net tracking #119595-1)

Consent to Participate in an Interview

You are invited to participate in an interview as part of a research project that seeks to understand how Principals and district leaders in single high school, school districts in Minnesota experience superintendent turnover. This study is being conducted by Matthew Boucher, a doctoral student at the University of St. Thomas and advised by Dr. Wharton-Beck in the Educational Leadership program at the University of St. Thomas. Your input in this phenomenological study is requested because you are a school or district administrator in a Minnesota school district with a single high school that is or will be experiencing change in superintendency. While the research predicts higher rates of Superintendent change in smaller school districts, the literature is almost silent on the impact of Superintendent turnover on the next layer of leadership in school districts. Understanding how the phenomenon of turnover in the superintendency is experienced by leaders in small to medium sized school districts is the focus of this study and you have valuable insights to offer.

Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study. If you agree to participate, I will ask you to participate in a 45-60 minute interview at a private location of your choice, with the possibility of follow up correspondences via phone or email.

Risks and benefits: There are no foreseen risks in this study and no direct benefits for participation. Our conversations will take place at a location and time of your choosing to offer privacy and be kept confidential, and you may refuse to answer any questions or discontinue your involvement in this study at any time. Participation in this study offers an opportunity to reflect on how you are experiencing the turnover in your district’s superintendent position, and the altruism of sharing your reflections for others to learn from.

Confidentiality: Only the researcher and a transcription service, REV.com, will have access to the interview data. I will code the identifiers so you are not named in the transcripts and save all data in a secure Google Drive account. Audio recordings will be deleted once they are transcribed. The information you provide will be reported in aggregate form in my dissertation. Your name and that of your district will be kept strictly confidential. No identifying details will be disclosed nor will direct quotes be attributed to an individual or district in my reports.

There is no compensation for participating in this study.

If you decide to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time, as well as the right to refuse to answer particular questions. Refusal to participate or discontinuing participation will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which the participant is otherwise entitled. The results of this research study may be presented at future conferences,
used for articles or submitted to journals. I will keep your de-identified information for future studies about education leadership. Your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

This study has been approved for human subject participation by the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board. If you have questions about this study you may contact the researcher Matthew Boucher at (612)369-4847 or Mcboucher@stthomas.edu, or his faculty advisor Dr. Aura Wharton-Beck at (651) 962-4897 or anwhartonbec@stthomas.edu. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, please review information on participant rights at www.stthomas.edu/irb/policiesandprocedures/forstudyparticipants/ or you may contact Sarah Muenster-Blakley, Director of the Institutional Review Board, at (651)-962-6035 or muen0526@stthomas.edu.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

**Statement of Consent:** I have read the above information and have received answers to my questions prior to signing this consent form. I consent to take part in the study. In addition to agreeing to participate, I also consent to having the interview audio-recorded. I am at least 18 years old.

Your Signature ___________________________ Date ________________

Your Name (printed) _____________________________________________

Signature of person obtaining consent ____________________________ Date ________________

Name (printed) _____________________________________________
Appendix C: Prospective Follow-up Interview Questions

Prospective Follow-up Interview Questions

1. Give a brief overview of your professional career, while being more detailed about your time working in your current school district.

2. What is your role in the school district, and how often do you interact with the superintendent in your current role?

3. How long have you worked with the outgoing superintendent?

4. How many Superintendents have you worked with throughout your career?

5. How would you describe the organizational culture in this district?

6. Based on your interactions with key stakeholders, describe how others have responded to the pending or recent change in the Superintendency?

7. What are some concerns you are hearing from other stakeholders about this transition?

8. What are some opportunities you are hearing from other stakeholders about this transition?

9. When you think of change in the Superintendency, what are some of your initial thoughts?

10. How would you describe your professional relationship with the outgoing Superintendent?

11. How would you describe your personal relationship with the outgoing Superintendent?

12. When you think of change in the Superintendency, what excites you personally or professionally? Or what opportunities do you perceive this change presents?

13. When you think of change in the Superintendency, what concerns you personally and professionally?

14. Do you feel any specific pressure or added challenges as a leader in this district relative to, or during this transition period?

15. Are there any other insights you might offer, and anything else you like to add that we did not discuss?
Appendix D: CITI Certifications

This is to certify that:

Matthew Boucher

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Human Subjects Research (HSR)

Human Subjects Research Training: Social-Behavioral-Educational Researchers

1 - Basic Course

Under requirements set by:

University of St. Thomas - Minnesota

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify?w1f7ed4d6-f0b2c-4a13-9239-606e0575184e-25633830
This is to certify that:

Matthew Boucher

Has completed the following Citi Program course:

- Information Privacy Security (IPS) (Curriculum Group)
- Student Researchers (IPS) (Course Learner Group)
- 1 - Basic Course (Stage)

Under requirements set by:

University of St. Thomas - Minnesota

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify?7e6057b9fc-b42b-4fa7-9a53-d73a22dda408-25633828

This is to certify that:

Matthew Boucher

Has completed the following Citi Program course:

- Citi Conflicts of Interest (Curriculum Group)
- Conflicts of Interest (Course Learner Group)
- 1 - Stage 1 (Stage)

Under requirements set by:

University of St. Thomas - Minnesota

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify?7e6057b9fc-b42b-4fa7-9a53-d73a22dda408-25633828
# Appendix E: Summary of Responses to Structured Questioning Approach

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Sentiment</th>
<th>Word/phrase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adriana</td>
<td>mXs weekly with Admin - weekly or less with staff</td>
<td>Mixed emotions, glad for outgoing super, she was very well respected and appreciated and built some strong structures and cultural elements - which I wondered, will those survive, and will I have the same trusting supportive relationship with next super? Can I be vulnerable with the next super?</td>
<td>Bittersweet - Fear of the unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blanca</td>
<td>Weekly admin and Ts, Ps/C Monthly</td>
<td>Mixed emotions, Excited for outgoing superintendent. Nervous about what will be changed, will I and our programming be supported? but also excited for some change</td>
<td>Mixed emotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clara</td>
<td>Multi per Day</td>
<td>It is time for a change, He seemed checked out, there where budget concerns and trust was fractured with Admin teams, too much dysfunction</td>
<td>I wish it would have happened sooner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delfina</td>
<td>mX weekly w/Admin, Weekly with Ts, monthly w/community</td>
<td>There was diminished trust and communication, and several things that were questionably handled</td>
<td>We were ready for change, excited for change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estafania</td>
<td>MultiX per month w/Admin, Monthly w/community at most</td>
<td>Will new super understand, respect and continue our initiatives and what is working, especially IB?</td>
<td>Concerning and curious, Concern and curiosity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faustino</td>
<td>No Data/Not in District P1</td>
<td>No Data/Not in District P1</td>
<td>No Data/Not in District P1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Notes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geneva</td>
<td>Weekly admin and Ts, Monthly or none w/community</td>
<td>Most were surprised, except those of us who were worked close to him. Staff sentiment - A year of anxiety and uncertainty, much of the work was stalled for lack of certainty around vision and mission. Bldg admin worried about the loss of autonomy and possibility of increased accountability…Community was surprised, &quot;why is this happening?&quot; &quot;wow didn’t see that coming&quot;. Anxiety and insecurity. Frozen, and forced to simply maintain the status quo.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halina</td>
<td>Weekly admin and Ts, Monthly w/community</td>
<td>Mixed feelings, but not surprised, some glad some disappointed Uncertain</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivan</td>
<td>Daily - w/Admin &amp; Staff</td>
<td>Community concerned about continuity - but split on outgoing superintendent - no one in the middle, either loved her or would love to see her go. Admin was ready for change. Uncertain</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juan</td>
<td>Daily w/Admin - Weekly staff - multiXs monthly w/Community</td>
<td>People were sad to see outgoing superintendent go, but excited to have someone new come in that could maybe make some changes that they were looking for. Opportunities for growth, got to point where you went to cabinet instead of superintendent for answers and support. Excitement-Empathy personally</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Klaus</td>
<td>No Data/Not in District P1</td>
<td>No Data/Not in District P1 Hen House: with rumors and half-truths and others impressions or 3rd hand experiences, but not a lot of substance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Much speculation around the circumstances of outgoing superintendent's departure from staff. Admin - relief and anxiety about what may come next. Frustration with outgoing super and focused on getting through next 4 months. Community - 50%/50% sadness and celebrating relieved, then "Ok let's do this"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Sentiment</th>
<th>Word/phrase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adriana</td>
<td>mXs weekly with Admin - weekly or less with staff</td>
<td>Frustrating</td>
<td>Hopeful for a collaborative communicator who is visible and present in the community and schools and develops/nurtures trusting relationships with admin team, and willing to make necessary changes and challenge the status quo - especially since we had NO say so in the process! Frustrated by lack of involvement or input in process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blanca</td>
<td>Weekly with Admin and Ts, Monthly w/community</td>
<td>Curious and anxious</td>
<td>I am curious about each candidate, hopeful they will honor the good work we have done and add to what we do well, while challenging us to improve. Process was not very inclusive but fine, I guess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clara</td>
<td>Daily or mX-weekly</td>
<td>Concerning</td>
<td>Concerns about the level of influence the outgoing superintendent may have on process, and with his ties to search firm, hoping for a more collaborative and supportive superintendent.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Delfina
Weekly with Admin and Ts, Monthly w/community
Superintendent and the search firm selected the candidates and interviewed them, then brought forth finalists, then we were invited to watch
Frustrating lack of involvement and transparency

Estafania
Weekly with Admin and Ts, Monthly w/community
Concerns of new super not supporting existing programming (IB), what will they want to keep in place and what will they change?
Anxious

Faustino
No Data/Not in District P2
No Data/Not in District P2
No Data/Not in District P2

Geneva
Weekly Admin and Ts, Monthly or none w/community
Heavy focus on who might be applying and be named. What will that mean for me and my building - how will it impact autonomy, accountability, new initiatives, vision.
Uncertainty and doubt (self-doubt and doubting the process and board)

Halina
Weekly w/Ts, but daily w/admin
A lot of focus and speculation on an internal candidate, both in the building and community.
Intensely Uncertain

Ivan
Daily - w/Admin & Staff
A lot of focus on gathering info and vetting candidates through individual networks. Admin & Teacher's #1 desired attribute was transparency and honesty in communication from superintendent - wanting to be able to trust the answer even if it is not what was wanted. Community sentiment split along fault lines based on experiences with outgoing superintendent.
Tense
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Sentiment</th>
<th>Word/phrase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Juan</strong></td>
<td>Weekly-staff,</td>
<td>People were excited by the candidates and felt like we had an opportunity to grow</td>
<td>Excitedly apprehensive(staff), excitement &amp; Curiosity (admin)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Klaus</strong></td>
<td>No Data/Not in District P2</td>
<td>No Data/Not in District P2</td>
<td>A focus on what we don't have or don't want</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lucianna</strong></td>
<td>Admin-multiXs Daily, Ts-Daily,</td>
<td>Some staff had trust issues with outgoing superintendent, so some excitement but also nervousness. Admin had concerns about level of input in selection process the outgoing superintendent may have, due to trust issues</td>
<td>Exhausting and overwhelming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Admin, Ts / 2x monthly w/community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adriana</strong></td>
<td>mX-Weekly Admin, Ts / 2x monthly w/community</td>
<td>We got the one we wanted, she was rock solid, and the others were not for us. Glad it was her because we were frustrated with the lack of involvement in the process</td>
<td>Exciting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Blanca</strong></td>
<td>Weekly with Admin and Ts, Monthly w/community</td>
<td>Excited to start building a relationship and working with new super. What will her leadership style be, will it be collaborative?</td>
<td>Anxious and exciting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clara</strong></td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Mostly excited for a new, hopefully supportive and collaborative culture to be developed.</td>
<td>= amounts of Excitement, curiosity and nervousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Delfina</strong></td>
<td>mX-Weekly Admin, Ts weekly, and 2x monthly w/community</td>
<td>Impressed so far, the new superintendent made a concerted effort to be involved in the community and moved his family here.</td>
<td>Excited and ready but a little nervous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Frequency with Staff/Groups</td>
<td>Notes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estafania</td>
<td>Weekly with Admin &amp; Ts, Monthly w/community</td>
<td>New super took time to meet and listen. People felt valued and were generally excited. Validation and excitement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faustino</td>
<td>No Data/Not in District P3</td>
<td>No Data/Not in District P3</td>
<td>No Data/Not in District P3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geneva</td>
<td>MultiXs Monthly w/Admin &amp; Ts, none w/community</td>
<td>Admin were very worried about admin moves and often sought insider info on new superintendent and plans or changes in vision/initiatives. Discomfort over possibility of increasing accountability. Interesting to observe the intensity of self-interest - what will this mean for me?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halina</td>
<td>Daily w/staff, Weekly w/others</td>
<td>Largely celebrated the selection of the internal candidate, some internal reluctance based on past experiences, but almost overwhelmingly positively received. Excitement, Apprehension, uncertainty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivan</td>
<td>Daily-Admin, Weekly Staff, 2x monthly w/P&amp;C</td>
<td>Skepticism and conspiracy theories were the focus when negotiations fell through with the top candidate - among staff and community. Once the 2nd candidate was named and community moved past frustration with loss of 1st candidate, then hopeful. I think everyone was looking forward to change. Hopeful</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juan</td>
<td>Daily w/staff and Admin, MultiXs Monthly w/community (each group conversation freq trailed off until installation)</td>
<td>Excitement and curiosity, lots of inquiries about what does this mean, or what do you think…Admin and staff were on board with decision. Excitement and curiosity,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Phase 4 - Installation of new Super

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Sentiment</th>
<th>Word/phrase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adriana</strong></td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Uncertainty/Trust building</td>
<td>Will she be what sold us on her, will she be the leader she espoused she was, and we all got excited about? Building trust, but wondering…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Blanca</strong></td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Let's do this, let's get to work</td>
<td>Welcome the fresh perspectives. Is there another agenda? Or will we pursue what was stated in the selection/interview process?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clara</strong></td>
<td>No Data/Not in District P4</td>
<td>No Data/Not in District P4</td>
<td>No Data/Not in District P4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Delfina</strong></td>
<td>Weekly w/Admin, monthly w/ Ts &amp; w/community</td>
<td>Optimistic</td>
<td>Impressed so far, initial work has been collaborative and communication has been good. We are learning together as an admin team and that is exciting and engaging.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Details</td>
<td>Comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estafania</td>
<td>MultiXs Monthly w/ Admin &amp; Ts, Little to no w/ community</td>
<td>Initially people were hopeful and excited and felt listened to. Now there is less communication and some decisions and how they were handled have led to some mistrust, doubt and insecurity.</td>
<td>Optimism has turned to uncertainty and questions of trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faustino</td>
<td>Bi-Monthly/Ts, and Admin, little to none w/ community</td>
<td>She challenges the status-quo and is very focused on admin and teacher's professional learning and growth</td>
<td>Encouraged, growing and stretched</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geneva</td>
<td>MultiXs Monthly w/ Admin &amp; Ts, Little to no w/ community</td>
<td>Admin and teachers seem to always be trying to navigate and figure the new superintendent out without often actually going to her. More indirect information gathering.</td>
<td>Continued uncertainty with some self-doubt and insecurity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halina</td>
<td>Weekly w/Instructional Leaders and Admin, Monthly with Staff or community</td>
<td>Generally supportive conversations, even though she is pushing the admin team to research, reflect, learn and challenge the status quo</td>
<td>Optimistic and being challenged to grow and think differently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivan</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Straight forward, open and good communications, not afraid to make the tough decisions, level headed and thoughtful.</td>
<td>Hopeful, Opportunity for Growth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Juan  Ts MultiXs weekly, Onboard but wanting to know what new Super is all about, in practice, on the daily. Admin concerned with communication and flow of information. Doing great job with community. Community overwhelmingly positive. Admin has lingering excitement but growing apprehension, "did we pick the right person?"

Klaus  appreciate new superintendent's positivity, willingness to listen and build relationships  A little guarded

Lucianna  MultiXs weekly w/Admin, Weekly w/Ts, little to none w/community  As an Admin I felt like I was walking on eggshells, with staff and board members all wanting to know my thoughts, while I am trying to figure them out for me. Teachers had a wait and see perspective, and some uncertainty. The guard is slowly going down, and trust is building
Appendix F: Reported Stakeholder Sentiment by Phase of Superintendent Transition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Phase 1</th>
<th>Phase 2</th>
<th>Phase 3</th>
<th>Phase 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adrianna</strong></td>
<td>Mixed emotions, glad for outgoing super, she was very well respected and appreciated and built some strong structures and cultural elements - which I wondered, will those survive and will I have the same trusting supportive relationship with next super? Can’t be vulnerable with the next super?</td>
<td>Hopeful for a collaborative communicator who is visible and present in the community and schools and develops/nurture trusting relationships with admin team, and willing to make necessary changes and challenge the status quo - especially since we had NO say so in the process! Frustrated by lack of involvement or input in process.</td>
<td>We got the one we wanted, she was rock solid and the others were not for us. Glad it was her because we were frustrated with the lack of involvement in the process.</td>
<td>Will she be what sold us on her, will she be the leader she espoused she was and we all got excited about? Building trust, but wondering...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Manca</strong></td>
<td>Mixed emotions, excited for outgoing superintendent. Nervous about what will be changed, will I and our programming be supported? But also excited for some change</td>
<td>I am curious about each candidate, hopeful they will honor the good work we have done and add to what we do well, while challenging us to improve. Process was not very inclusive but fine, I guess</td>
<td>Excited to start building a relationship and working with new super. What will her leadership style be, will it be collaborative?</td>
<td>Welcome the fresh perspectives. Is there another agenda? Or will we pursue what was stated in the selection/interview process?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clara</strong></td>
<td>It is time for a change, he seemed checked out, there were budget concerns and trust was fractured with admin teams, too much dysfunction</td>
<td>Concerns about the level of influence the outgoing superintendent may have on process, and with his ties to search firm, hoping for a more collaborative and supportive superintendent.</td>
<td>Mostly excited for a new, hopefully supportive and collaborative culture to be developed.</td>
<td>No Data/Not in District P4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dellina</strong></td>
<td>There was diminished trust and communication, and several things that were unquestionably handled</td>
<td>Superintendent and the search firm selected the candidates and interviewed them, then brought forth finalists, then we were invited to watch.</td>
<td>Impressed so far, the new superintendent made a concerted effort to be involved in the community and moved his family here.</td>
<td>Impressed so far, initial work has been collaborative and communication has been good. We are learning together as an admin team and that is exciting and engaging.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Estafania</strong></td>
<td>Will new super understand, respect and continue our initiatives and what is working especially ill?</td>
<td>Concerns of new super not supporting existing programming [Ilk], what will they want to keep in place and what will they change?</td>
<td>New super took time to meet and listen. People felt valued and were generally excited</td>
<td>Initially people were hopeful and excited and felt listened to. Now there is less communication and some decisions and how they were handled have led to some mistrust, doubt and insecurity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Faustino</strong></td>
<td>No Data/Not in District P1</td>
<td>No Data/Not in District P2</td>
<td>No Data/Not in District P3</td>
<td>She challenges the status quo and is very focused on admin and teacher’s professional learning and growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Geneva</strong></td>
<td>Most were surprised, except those of us who were worked close to him. Staff sentiment - a year of anxiety and Uncertainty, much of the work was stalled for lack of certainty around vision and mission. Admin worried about the loss of autonomy and possibility of increased accountability...Community was surprised, “why is this happening?” “Wow didn’t see that coming”.</td>
<td>Heavy focus on who might be applying and being named. What will that mean for me and my building? How will it impact autonomy, accountability, new initiatives, vision.</td>
<td>Admin were very worried about admin moves and often sought insider info on new superintendent and plans or changes in vision/initiatives. Discomfort over possibility of increasing accountability</td>
<td>Admin and teachers seem to always be trying to navigate and figure the new superintendent out without often actually going to her. More indirect information gathering.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudonym</td>
<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>Phase 3</td>
<td>Phase 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halla</td>
<td>Mixed feelings, but not surprised, some glad, some disappointed</td>
<td>A lot of focus and speculation on an internal candidate, both in the building and community.</td>
<td>Largely celebrated the selection of the internal candidate, some internal reluctance based on past experiences, but almost overwhelmingly positively received</td>
<td>Generally supportive conversations, even though she is pushing the admin team to research, reflect, learn, and challenge the status quo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>Community concerned about continuity - but split on outgoing superintendent - no one in the middle, either loved her or would love to see her go. Admin was ready for change.</td>
<td>A lot of focus on gathering info and vetting candidates through individual networks. Admin &amp; Teachers #1 desired attribute was transparency and honesty in communication from superintendent - wanting to be able to trust the answer even if it is not what was wanted. Community sentiment split along fault lines based on experiences with outgoing superintendent.</td>
<td>Skepticism and conspiracy theories were the focus when negotiations fell through with the top candidate - among staff and community. Once the 2nd candidate was named and community moved past frustration with loss of 1st candidate, then hopeful. I think everyone was looking forward to change.</td>
<td>Straight forward, open and good communications, not afraid to make the tough decisions, level headed and thoughtful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juan</td>
<td>People were sad to see outgoing superintendent go, but excited to have someone new come in that could maybe make some changes that they were looking for. Opportunities for growth, got to point where you want to cabinet instead of superintendent for answers and support</td>
<td>People were excited by the candidates and felt like we had an opportunity to grow</td>
<td>Excitement and curiosity, lots of inquiries about what does this mean, or what do you think... Admin and staff were on board with decision</td>
<td>Onboard but wanting to know what new super is all about, in practice, on the daily. Admin concerned with communication and flow of information. Doing great job with community. Community overwhelmingly positive. Admin has lingering excitement but growing apprehension, &quot;do we pick the right person?&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rana</td>
<td>No Data/Net in District P1</td>
<td>No Data/Net in District P2</td>
<td>Worried about outsiders coming in and &quot;bulldozing&quot; their way through…. But open to new ideas, after 30+ yrs with previous super</td>
<td>appreciate new superintendent's positivity, willingness to listen and build relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>Much speculation around the circumstances of outgoing superintendent's departure from staff. Admin - relief and anxiety about what may come next. Frustration with outgoing super and focused on getting through next 4 months. Community - 30%/30% sadness and celebrating</td>
<td>Some staff had trust issues with outgoing superintendent, so some excitement but also nervousness. Admin had concerns about level of input in selection process the outgoing superintendent may have, due to trust issues</td>
<td>Deep concerns about the contract negotiations that fell through with #1 candidate, and distrust ever-how it was handled by board chair. Community wondered why the #1 candidate did not want to come here!</td>
<td>As an Admin I felt like I was walking on eggshells, with staff and board members all wanting to know my thoughts, while I am trying to figure them out for me. Teachers had a wait and see perspective, and some uncertainty.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix G: Overview of Sub-Findings by Phase of Superintendent Transition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of Dialogue - General</th>
<th>Sentiment</th>
<th>Word/phrase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overview</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frequency + Trust Finding 1:</strong> The distrust subgroup had a .75 or greater participant average on six of the 12 frequency of dialogue data points.</td>
<td>Finding 1: the administrators in this study experienced curiosity, excitement, uncertainty, and anxiety throughout their interaction with the phenomenon of superintendent turnover.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frequency + Trust Finding 2:</strong> The participants in the distrust subgroup in this study experienced a significantly higher frequency of dialogue with all stakeholder groups during the announcement phase (phase 1) of superintendent transition than their peers in the trust subgroup.</td>
<td>Finding 1: During the announcement phase of superintendent transition stakeholders experienced a variety of mixed emotions about the pending change in superintendency, ranging from personal (excitement and uncertainty or anxiety), to institutional (readiness for change and concerns for continuity), to a sentimental divide between celebration and sorrow in the community within school districts with reported distrust with outgoing superintendent.</td>
<td>Finding 2: when there is distrust between the outgoing superintendent and administrators in single high school, school districts, with enrollments less than 8750 students, excitement and relief was experienced by building and district administration during the announcement phase of superintendent transition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frequency + Trust Finding 3:</strong> The distrust subgroup experienced a significantly higher frequency of dialogue with staff and administrative stakeholders during the search/selection process or phase of superintendent turnover.</td>
<td>Finding 2: During the search/selection phase of superintendent transition administrators and stakeholders in this study desired both a) transparency and involvement in the selection process, and b) a new superintendent who is a collaborative, supportive, visible leader and candid communicator who will honor the district values and initiatives that stakeholders considered central to their perceived identity of the district.</td>
<td>Finding 3: excitement and relief during the search phase is the only theme that emerged with a discernable connection to the level of trust with the outgoing superintendent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase 3</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frequency + Trust Finding 4:</strong> The distrust subgroup experienced a significantly higher frequency of dialogue participant average with the administration stakeholder group during the appointment phase (phase 3) of superintendent transition than the participants in the trust subgroup.</td>
<td>Finding 3: During the appointment of new hire phase of superintendent transition administrators and stakeholders experienced excitement and optimism about the incoming superintendent and a desire for an organizational culture of collaboration under their leadership.</td>
<td>Finding 4: the installation phase was predominantly experienced with some level of excitement by the participants in this research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase 4</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frequency + Trust Finding 5:</strong> There was no significant difference between the frequency of dialogue experienced by members of either the trust or distrust subgroups during the installation phase (phase 4) of superintendent transition.</td>
<td>Finding 4: The installation phase of superintendent transition is characterized as a trust building phase by administrators (primarily) and stakeholders as they seek to establish trust in their relationship with the new district leader, while primarily focused on developing answers to the following questions, a) will you be the leader we thought you would be, and b) do you care about my growth as a leader and learner as well as improving student outcomes?</td>
<td>Finding 5: administrators in single high school, school districts, with enrollments less than 8750 students, have negative and stressful experiences during the search phase of superintendent transition.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**Note:** The above table provides an overview of the key sub-findings by phase of superintendent transition, including their frequency of dialogue and sentiment experiences. Each finding is described in detail within the text, focusing on the experiences and emotions of stakeholders across different phases of the transition process. The table highlights themes such as trust, frequency of dialogue, and the sentiment of stakeholders, offering insights into the challenges and expectations during each phase of the superintendent transition.
Appendix H: Participant Frequency by Stakeholder Group and Phase of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Staff</th>
<th>Admin</th>
<th>P/C</th>
<th>Phase 1 - Frequency of dialogue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adriana2</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>mX Weekly</td>
<td>Less&lt;Month</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blanca2</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clara1</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delfina1</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>mX Weekly</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estafania2</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faustino2</td>
<td>Not in district during this phase</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geneva1</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Less&lt;Month</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halina2</td>
<td>weekly</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivan1</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juan1</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Klaus1</td>
<td>Not in district during this phase</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucianna1</td>
<td>mX Daily</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

mX = multiple times...
Less < Monthly = less than monthly

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Staff</th>
<th>Admin</th>
<th>P/C</th>
<th>Phase 2 - Frequency of dialogue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adriana2</td>
<td>mX Weekly</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Less&lt;Month</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blanca2</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clara1</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delfina1</td>
<td>mX Weekly</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estafania2</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faustino2</td>
<td>Not in district during this phase</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geneva1</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Less&lt;Month</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halina2</td>
<td>weekly</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivan1</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juan1</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Klaus1</td>
<td>Not in district during this phase</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucianna1</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>mX Daily</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

mX = multiple times...
Less < Monthly = less than monthly

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Staff</th>
<th>Admin</th>
<th>P/C</th>
<th>Phase 3 - Frequency of dialogue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adriana2</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>mX Weekly</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blanca2</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clara1</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delfina1</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>mX Weekly</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estafania2</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faustino2</td>
<td>Not in district during this phase</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geneva1</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>Less&lt;Month</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halina2</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivan1</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juan1</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Klaus1</td>
<td>Not in district during this phase</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucianna1</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>Hourly</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

mX = multiple times...
Less < Monthly = less than monthly

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Staff</th>
<th>Admin</th>
<th>P/C</th>
<th>Phase 4 - Frequency of dialogue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adriana2</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blanca2</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clara1</td>
<td>Not in district during this phase</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delfina1</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>Less&lt;Month</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estafania2</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faustino2</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geneva1</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>Less&lt;Month</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halina2</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivan1</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juan1</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Klaus1</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>Less&lt;Month</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucianna1</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>Less&lt;Month</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix I: Overview of Frequency of dialogue by Phase of Superintendent Transition

### Phase 1 - Announcement of Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholders</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers/Staff:</td>
<td>mX Daily</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 not in position in district during this phase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mode = Weekly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9/10 Weekly or more frequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admin:</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mX Weekly</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mode = Daily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9/10 Weekly or more frequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents/Comm:</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mode = Monthly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8/10 Monthly or more frequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Less than Monthly</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**mX = multiple times**

### Phase 2 - Search

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholders</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers/Staff:</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2 not in position in district during this phase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mX Weekly</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mode = Weekly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10/10 Weekly or more frequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Highest frequency w/staff of all phases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admin:</td>
<td>mX Daily</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mode = Weekly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mX Weekly</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10/10 Weekly or more frequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Highest frequency w/Admin of all phases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents/Comm:</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mode = Monthly/Monthly or less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6/10 Monthly or more frequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Less than Monthly</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**mX = multiple times**
### Phase 3 - Appointment/Announcement of New Hire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholders</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers/Staff:</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2 not in position in district during this phase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Mode = Weekly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8/10 Weekly or more frequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hourly</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mode = Weekly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mX Weekly</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9/10 Weekly or more frequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admin:</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mode = mX Monthly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mX Weekly</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2/11 Weekly or more frequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Mode = mX Monthly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2/11 Weekly or more frequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents/Comm:</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mode = mX Monthly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9/10 Monthly or more frequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9/10 Monthly or more frequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Less than Monthly</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Highest frequency w/Parents of all phases</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**mX = multiple times**

### Phase 4 - Installation of New Super

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholders</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers/Staff:</td>
<td>mX Weekly</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 not in position in district during this phase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mode = mX Monthly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2/11 Weekly or more frequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admin:</td>
<td>mX Weekly</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mode = mX Monthly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Mode = mX Monthly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5/11 Weekly or more frequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents/Comm:</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Mode = Monthly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Less than Monthly</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7/11 Monthly or mX Monthly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**mX = multiple times**
Appendix J: Participant Frequency of Dialogue Comparing Reported Trust and Distrust

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Staff</th>
<th>Admin</th>
<th>P/C</th>
<th>Phase 1 - Frequency of dialogue</th>
<th>Phase 2 - Frequency of dialogue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adriana2</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>mX Weekly</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>mX Weekly</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blanca2</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clara1</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>Daily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delfina1</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>mX Weekly</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estafania2</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faustino2</td>
<td>Not in district during this phase</td>
<td>Not in district during this phase</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>Daily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geneva1</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Less&lt;Month</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halina2</td>
<td>weekly</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivan1</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>mx Monthly</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>Daily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juan1</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>mx Monthly</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Klaus1</td>
<td>Not in district during this phase</td>
<td>Not in district during this phase</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>Daily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucianna1</td>
<td>mX Daily</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>mX Daily</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Staff</th>
<th>Admin</th>
<th>P/C</th>
<th>Phase 3 - Frequency of dialogue</th>
<th>Phase 4 - Frequency of dialogue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adriana2</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>mX Weekly</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blanca2</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clara1</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Not in district during this phase</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delfina1</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>mX Weekly</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estafania2</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faustino2</td>
<td>Not in district during this phase</td>
<td>Not in district during this phase</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geneva1</td>
<td>mx Monthly</td>
<td>mx Monthly</td>
<td>Less&lt;Month</td>
<td>mx Monthly</td>
<td>mx Monthly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halina2</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivan1</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>mx Monthly</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juan1</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Klaus1</td>
<td>Not in district during this phase</td>
<td>Not in district during this phase</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucianna1</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>Hourly</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

mX = multiple times...  
Less < Monthly = less than monthly
Appendix K: Frequency of Dialogue: Trust/Distrust Trend Sum and Participant Averages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hourly</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mX Weekly</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less&lt;Monthly</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Frequency of Convo - Phase 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>Staff</th>
<th>Admin</th>
<th>P/C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Weekly (3)</td>
<td>mX Weekly</td>
<td>Monthly (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>Weekly (2)</td>
<td>Less&gt;Monthly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Weekly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Frequency of Convo - Phase 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>Staff</th>
<th>Admin</th>
<th>P/C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mX Weekly</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>Monthly (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Weekly (3)</td>
<td>Weekly (3)</td>
<td>Less&gt;Month (2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Trend sum/Participant average

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mX Weekly</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less&lt;Monthly</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Frequency of Convo - Phase 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>Staff</th>
<th>Admin</th>
<th>P/C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Daily (2)</td>
<td>mX Weekly</td>
<td>Monthly (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Weekly (3)</td>
<td>mX Weekly</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>Weekly (2)</td>
<td>Less&gt;Monthly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Frequency of Convo - Phase 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>Staff</th>
<th>Admin</th>
<th>P/C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Daily (2)</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Weekly (3)</td>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>Monthly (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mX Daily</td>
<td>Weekly (2)</td>
<td>Less&gt;Monthly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Trend sum/Participant average

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mX Weekly</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less&lt;Monthly</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Disturb increased frequency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less&lt;Monthly</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Frequency of Convo - Phase 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hourly</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mX Weekly</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less&lt;Monthly</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Frequency of Convo - Phase 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hourly</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mX Daily</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less&lt;Monthly</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Trend sum/Participant average

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mX Weekly</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less&lt;Monthly</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Frequency of Convo - Phase 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hourly</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mX Weekly</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less&lt;Monthly</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Frequency of Convo - Phase 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hourly</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mX Weekly</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less&lt;Monthly</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Trend sum/Participant average

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mX Weekly</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mX Monthly</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less&lt;Monthly</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>