Choosing to Stay: Superintendent Leadership, Purpose, and Endurance

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

Title: Choosing to Stay: Superintendent Leadership, Purpose, and Endurance

Superintendent turnover continues to challenge district stability, especially in rural systems where consistent leadership matters. While much of the research focuses on why superintendents leave, less attention has been given to why they stay. This mixed methods study examined the factors that contribute to superintendent longevity in Oregon despite increasing complexity, political pressure, and public scrutiny. Using a sequential explanatory design, survey data were collected statewide, where 92 superintendents took the survey. This was followed by focus group interviews to better understand those results, where 34 superintendents attended in a total of 9 groups. Findings identified seven interconnected factors: strong school board relationships, a clear sense of purpose centered on students, community connection, visible and relational leadership, resilience, professional growth, and trust built through communication. These factors work together rather than in isolation, creating a system that supports sustained leadership. Among them, board relationships and communication stood out as the most influential. This study shifts the focus from why superintendents leave to why they stay, highlighting the importance of relationships, purpose, and the conditions that allow leaders to continue doing the work.

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I have always believed that growth comes from stepping into uncomfortable situations. Throughout my life, I've leaned into that discomfort, and it has helped shape me into the leader I strive to be today. I've been fortunate to have people along the way who pushed me, challenged me, and never let me settle for average.

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DEDICATION

To my wife, Heidi, who has made this dream a reality with her unwavering encouragement and sacrifice, and to my two boys, Cameron and Quinten, who continuously light my fire to be a better person.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION....11
Rural Schools in the 21st Century....13
My Rationale for This Study....14
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE SYNTHESIS....16
Principal Leadership....17
Superintendent Leadership....19
Leadership Challenges....20
Resources....21
Role Overload....21
Budget....22
Conclusion....23
CHAPTER III: METHOD....24
Setting....25
Participants....26
Sources of Data....27
Survey....27
Data Collection Plan: Survey....29
Interviews....31
Data Analysis Plan....35
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS....39
Participant Demographics....39
Quantitative Survey Findings....41
Qualitative Findings....47
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION....56
Interpretation of Findings....57
Implications for Practice....61

Recommendations for Future Research 65
Conclusion 68
APPENDICES 71
Appendix A: Survey Instrument 71
Appendix B: Interview Protocol 84
Appendix C: Consent Forms 86
REFERENCES 88

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Visual Model of the Study's Sequential Explanatory Design 24

Figure 4.1. Average Years of Superintendent Experience by District Classification.....40

Figure 4.2. Distribution of Superintendent Experience Levels.....40

Figure 4.3. Superintendent Perceptions of School Board Trust and Communication 41

Figure 4.4. Superintendent Perceptions of Community Support 42

Figure 4.5. Influence of Board-Community Partnerships on Retention 42

Figure 4.6. Perceived Impact of Leadership on Student Outcomes.....43

Figure 4.7. Motivation to Remain Based on Making a Difference.....43

Figure 4.8. Perceived Autonomy in Decision-Making 44

Figure 4.9. Professional Growth Opportunities 44

Figure 4.10. Encouragement of Innovation 44

Figure 4.11. Self-Perceived Resilience 45

Figure 4.12. Confidence in Stress Management 45

Figure 4.13. Work-Life Balance Perceptions 46

Figure 4.14. Alignment Between Values and District Vision 46

Figure 4.15. Alignment Between Values and District Vision 64

LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.4. Influence of School Board Relationships on Superintendent Retention.....48

Table 4.5. Sense of Purpose Related to Student Impact 49

Table 4.6. Community Connection and Commitment 50

Table 4.7. Autonomy in Superintendent Decision-Making 52

Table 4.8. Resilience in Managing Superintendent Challenges 53

Table 4.9. Professional Growth and Development Opportunities 54

Table 4.10. Importance of Vision 55

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The historical narrative of small, rural country schools traces its roots back to the colonial period, marked by the emergence of a distinctive American notion of free, nonsectarian public education. The New England colonies, particularly Massachusetts Bay, played a pivotal role in shaping this educational landscape. In 1647, Massachusetts Bay enacted the first American statute dedicated to establishing a school system, emphasizing the importance of education. Particularly, in Puritan New England, education was seen as a fundamental aspect of preparing individuals for salvation, leading to the formation of schools by church elders to teach students to read the Bible. This legislative initiative also laid the foundation for petty schools, which focused on reading, writing, and arithmetic later, and evolved into grammar schools. Formal education in a classroom setting was a privilege predominantly enjoyed by White middle- and upper-class children, whose education did not strain the family's economic resources. Boys destined for specific career paths received extended schooling with a focus on academic and business skills. Conversely, children from impoverished families were often encouraged to forge their own paths in life, with sporadic or non-existent opportunities for literacy education.

Thomas Jefferson, envisioning an educated populace as a safeguard for effective governance in a democracy, advocated for free, public education. His belief that only educated citizens could substantiate the principle of "the government that governs least, governs best" was instrumental. Jefferson’s proposal to allocate land in the Northwest Territory for public education purposes became the basis for the Land Ordinance of 1784, subsequently passed by the Confederation of States as the Northwest Ordinances of 1785 and 1787. These laws provided a legal framework for education in the Northwest Territory and later influenced all western

states. The Northwest Ordinances allowed the leasing of public lands to support local schools, but the revenue from land leases proved insufficient. Consequently, in the mid-1820s, Congress sanctioned the sale of lands to establish permanent funds for public school endowments. During this time, there were approximately 212,000 one-room schools; half of the students were enrolled. Between 1890 and 1940, the role of the principal underwent significant changes, transitioning from a lead teacher in one-room schoolhouses to a middle manager responsible for maintaining discipline and managing administrative tasks (Rousmaniere, 2013). This period also witnessed the formation of a more formal district structure, contributing to the bureaucratic model of school leadership (Cremin, 1970; Rousemanire, 2013).

The bureaucratic model relies on rules and laws to achieve organizational goals but may not be suitable for future needs. Aligned with traditional management theories, this model supported the growing number of public schools and the establishment of a formal accountability structure—the school district. The district, following a bureaucratic model, emphasizes efficiency with a superintendent at the top of the organizational chart and a formal chain of command for decision-making (Pratt, 2014). This decision-making structure became deeply ingrained as school districts expanded in size and number (Elmore, 1999; Oplatka, 2004).

In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education, through its publication "A Nation at Risk," identified four crucial aspects of education: content, expectations, time, and teaching. Notably, this report did not address the influence of school structure, leadership, or culture on these aspects. However, it emphasized the deterioration of the education system, describing it as being eroded "by a rising tide of mediocrity" (Fullan, 2014). The urgent need to enhance the educational system to compete globally was stressed, bringing education reform to the forefront. The report also underscored significant achievement gaps among white, black, and

Hispanic students, yet it lacked discernible strategies to address the crisis (Birman et al., 2013; Fullan, 2014).

Rural Schools in the 21st Century

In 2001, the United States attempted education reform with the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). This legislation, a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), mandated reading and math testing for all students in grades 3-8. Schools were obligated to achieve "adequate yearly progress" based on student test scores, and every classroom was required to have a qualified teacher by 2006 (Federal Education Budget Project, 2014). While NCLB provided a strategy lacking in "A Nation at Risk," it did not specify how this would impact the role of the principal (Fullan, 2014).

Simultaneously, the nation navigated the implementation of the educational policy, Race to the Top, introduced in 2009. The Race to the Top initiative (2015) incentivizes states to instigate systemic reforms aimed at improving teaching and learning. Four key areas of reform were highlighted:

1. Development of rigorous standards and improved assessments;
2. Adoption of enhanced data systems providing information on student progress to schools, teachers, and parents;
3. Support for teachers and school leaders to enhance effectiveness;
4. Increased emphasis and resources for rigorous interventions to turn around the lowest-performing schools.

For the first time, school leaders were recognized as a crucial aspect of education reform in *Race to the Top*, signaling a shift towards addressing the impact of school leadership on global

competitiveness (Bambrick-Santoyo & Peiser, 2012; Fullan, 2014; Race to the Top, 2015). This will have an impact on rural schools moving into the future years.

My Rationale for This Study

Growing up, I attended many small rural schools in Northeastern Oregon in quaint little towns with populations not exceeding 2000 people. Class sizes were 15-20 students, and most of the schools had two teachers per grade. Everyone knew everyone, and the teachers were embedded in the community. I would see teachers at church or the grocery store and sometimes volunteering for another organization that would be trying to raise money for Christmas gifts for families that were struggling. The community rallied together with the school to make sure that all the families were taken care of. I noticed this at a young age, but especially when I got into high school. In the small school that I attended, almost every student was involved in some extra-curricular activity like sports, Future Farmers of America (FFA), Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA), and Band/choir. In my eyes, home football and basketball games were the epicenter of the community. The town would basically shut down and come to the games to support the student-athletes. The cheers and jeers at the games made them momentous in so many lives on and off the court.

As I got into teaching, my first assignment was as a sixth-grade teacher with 27 students. There was another sixth-grade teacher with 25 students just across the hallway. This assignment was in a small rural town in Eastern Oregon. As I taught and was able to coach Jr. High and High School sports, it was apparent to me that I wanted to go into an administrative leadership role. As a couple of years passed, I watched carefully how the principal of our school conducted herself. I asked many questions about her role and responsibilities. To my surprise, she suggested I start taking some leadership classes to get my administrative license. I started the classes and put in

for a superintendent/principal position in the neighboring school district, which was very rural and very small. I ended up getting that position, and served for six years, where I was a dual-role superintendent/principal. I moved on from the dual role position to a larger school, as a superintendent, still in Eastern Oregon, where I am now in my second year.

I honestly didn't understand all the work and responsibilities that go with the dual administrative role. Trying to fulfill two positions simultaneously is challenging to say the least. Yes, you can say you are getting things accomplished, but there is a cost to this process. You can never give 100% to two things at the same time, especially this role. It has been my experience that those who try to manage dual-role administration, eventually burn out. The compensation is great, the experience is great, but it is not sustainable for the long haul. I have seen many dual-role administrators move on to other districts into a singular administrative role, I have seen them move out of administration and back into teaching, and I have seen them completely move out of the education world.

What I have learned in the dual-role administrator position is that you need to have complete transparency. First with your school board, making them aware that this role is demanding and that you are going to need some assistance with performing two positions. When I was the superintendent and the high school principal, we hired an elementary principal to take some of the demand off my shoulders. This has helped, but I was still in two roles. Second, you must be alright with working some long days and weekends. For me, this was communicating with my wife and making sure she understood these demands. I believe that there are too many young administrators, I was one of these, who want to jump in and prove that they can be superman or superwoman, who burn out before they really even get a taste of the real enjoyment of success.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE SYNTHESIS

Nationally, superintendent turnover is a well-documented issue, with tenure averaging 3 to 5 years, often shorter in large urban districts. For instance, a 2014 survey by the Council of the Great City Schools found that the average tenure of superintendents in urban districts was 3.2 years (edweek.org, 2014). Similarly, a 2018 analysis reported that in districts with more than 100,000 students, superintendents stayed on the job for an average of 5 years, compared to 6.62 years in smaller districts (edweek.org, 2018).

Moving to 2010-11, one-third of the approximately 100,000 public schools in the United States were located in rural areas (32,000), more than in suburbs (27,000), cities (26,000), or towns (14,000) and public schools in rural areas enrolled 12 million students, representing 24 percent of total enrollment (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). Oregon has approximately 1,207 schools statewide, and 627 of these schools are town/rural schools (52%). More than half of the schools in Oregon are small schools, yet they make up about 25% of the total State School Funding budget (SSF). Almost all major activities in small rural communities take place at the school and, on any given night, the school is bustling with activities (Hadden, 2000). The school normally provides most of the recreational and social activities of any small, rural community, and most communities fight to keep their local schools (Salinas, 2000). Although urban and suburban school superintendents serve the largest group of students in terms of sheer numbers of school children, there are actually more superintendents serving in rural school districts in the United States (Copeland, 2013).

Many of these small schools have one administrator who acts as the superintendent/principal. They have this dual role mostly due to funding. Historically, a small

rural school district hired a schoolmaster or teacher to serve multiple roles such as teacher, principal, nurse, cook, and custodian (Hilton, 1949). Today, this practice is still in effect, and many of the dual role administrators wear these hats and many more. They are subject to what Katz and Kahn (1978) termed "role ambiguity," wherein uncertainty about what a job should include coupled with an unwieldy range of role expectations leads to low job satisfaction and high tension (p. 190). What would today's definition of a dual role superintendent/principal be? Oftentimes, these dual-role administrators are charged with completing the work of both the superintendent and the building principal: "At its most basic level, creating a hybrid position requires a single individual to perform the work responsibilities previously held by two individuals" (Forner et al. 2012, p. 9). The obligations and expectations of one individual fulfilling both roles may result in a position that is difficult to be successfully filled by one individual (Alvoid & Black, 2014; Canales et al., 2010). Typically, this is where the role of the principal should begin.

Principal Leadership

In today's world, principals are under enormous pressure to provide important outcomes in student achievement, teacher retention, school climate, and to reduce absenteeism. They also have to work as efficiently as possible and have high energy when present with school community members. Grissom et al. (2021) state that mastery of organizational, people, and instructional skills underpins strong principal performance. They all come into play when principals carry out four key behaviors that the research points to:

- Focusing their work with teachers on instruction. This covers a range of activities, from coaching and evaluation to smart use of data to inform improvements. Some activities

often considered important in principal work with teachers may, in fact, not be helpful. These include classroom walkthroughs, depending on how a principal uses them.

- Building a productive school climate
- Forging collaboration and professional learning among teachers, community partners, and parents
- Managing personnel and resources well

The principal also plays a role in implementing educational policies by overseeing day-to-day management functions to maintain safe and organized schools. Serving as a middle manager between the central office and the classroom, the principal is charged with solving the immediate problems presented on a daily basis to ensure an orderly school atmosphere while at the same time implementing educational policy (Rousmaniere, 2013).

Moreover, principals are anticipated to adeptly communicate with diverse audiences and handle public relations responsibilities. They are also required to concentrate on fostering positive relationships and cultivating a favorable organizational culture within the school. Principals must empower teachers and staff to take on leadership roles, leveraging the collective expertise within the school community. Collaboration and shared decision-making contribute to a sense of ownership among the stakeholders, leading to increased commitment and effectiveness in achieving educational goals. In small schools, where each member's contribution is significant, principal leadership that embraces inclusivity and collaboration becomes a cornerstone for success. Yang (2014) reported that failing schools have inadequate leadership, which requires a transformational approach to school improvement. When accounting for student success, successful school leaders must draw on elements of instructional leadership and

transformational leaders (Day et al. 2016). A common career advancement would be the superintendency, which has its own unique leadership needs.

Superintendent Leadership

The role of a superintendent in small schools carries distinctive responsibilities and challenges that necessitate a nuanced approach to leadership. Kowalski (2013) identified that the superintendent position is one that involves a complex range of expectations and duties, which requires leadership skills, fiscal abilities, and managerial expertise. The role of a superintendent in small schools carries distinctive responsibilities and challenges that necessitate a nuanced approach to leadership. Small school districts often operate with limited financial resources and staffing, placing additional demands on superintendents to be resourceful and strategic in their decision-making. The superintendent's leadership is crucial in creating a vision for the district that aligns with the unique needs and goals of a smaller educational community.

Historically, in the 2000s and 2010s, there was a discernible shift in the role of superintendents in small schools towards a more holistic and collaborative approach. With an increased emphasis on student achievement, superintendents started to play a more active role in instructional leadership, curriculum development, and fostering a positive learning environment. Community engagement became a priority as superintendents recognized the significance of building strong relationships with parents, teachers, and local stakeholders. The evolving role also saw superintendents championing technology integration and innovative teaching methodologies, aiming to enhance educational outcomes in the context of limited resources. As schools became more complex, the role of superintendents evolved over time, away from that of being an educator, and into that of serving as the chief executive officer and advisor to the school board (Campbell et al. 1985).

To fulfill the duties of being a superintendent, one must work diligently with and carry out the directives of the school board. Tekniepe (2015) wrote, “When a superintendent views a board member as having a sufficient amount of training and knowledge to effectively perform their job functions, adversarial tension and mistrust between the two parties both wane” (p. 9). Establishing strong relationships with school boards, teachers, parents, and community members is paramount for effective leadership. By cultivating a culture of transparency and inclusivity, superintendents can build trust and support, crucial elements for the sustained success of small schools.

Leadership Challenges

Principals, superintendents, and superintendent/principals in small rural schools grapple with challenges related to accountability, new standards implementation, and educational transparency (Bambrick-Santoyo & Peiser, 2012; Fullan, 2014). The 1980s report *A Nation at Risk* highlighted concerns about the effectiveness of small rural schools and the education of students in these communities (Bard, Gardener & Wieland, 2005).

Leadership in small schools presents a distinct set of challenges that require adaptive and multifaceted approaches. Tobin (2006) suggests that the primary challenge of the superintendent/principal is having to be all things to all people and having to serve in multiple roles. Including, sometimes serving as a classroom teacher in addition to their other duties (Canales et al 2010, Cortez-Jimenez, 2012). Larger districts typically have multiple layers of staff to take on all the educational responsibilities, but the superintendent/principal must maintain the opportunities for students to learn while balancing limited resources and limited funding without other administrative support (Canales et al 2010, Copeland, 2013). Rural schools encounter distinct leadership challenges, whether led by a superintendent, principal, or

superintendent/principal. Arnold and the Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning (2004) argue that rural school districts face unique challenges in recruiting administrators compared to urban and suburban counterparts.

Resources. One of the primary challenges is the limited availability of resources. Small schools often operate on constrained budgets, leading to difficulties in providing diverse educational opportunities and support services. Leaders in small schools must navigate the delicate task of optimizing resource allocation to meet both academic and operational needs. The challenge lies in making strategic decisions that prioritize essential aspects of education while maintaining fiscal responsibility. Tekniepe (2015) states, "Superintendents in school districts in which low reserve balances in the general operating fund impact fiscal policy and budgeting decisions were more likely to experience a push-induced departure" (p. 9). This necessitates creative problem-solving, collaboration with community stakeholders, and a keen understanding of financial management to ensure the school's sustainability and effectiveness in a resource-limited environment. Rural districts also faced burdens that were either nonexistent or less problematic in their non-rural counterparts, especially in regard to funding (Yettick et al. 2014, p. 12). In numerous rural districts, the fiscal constraints confronted are exacerbated by diminishing enrollments, as schools receive funding based on a per-pupil allocation.

Role Overload. Another significant challenge in small schools is the need for leaders to wear multiple hats. In these settings, administrators often find themselves assuming various roles, such as principal, instructional leader, and sometimes even custodian or bus driver. Rural districts have addressed challenges by adopting a strategy involving the consolidation of administrative roles and having the superintendent concurrently serving in the capacity of a building-level administrator. In some cases, one individual fulfills all the administrative duties

for the entire district, serving as superintendent and the only principal (Cronin, 2008). The expectation that one individual can perform the duties of both a school superintendent and a school principal, results in a position where an individual is expected to fulfill school board and governance functions as superintendent while simultaneously handling the hectic tasks and daily schedule of being a school principal (Yates & Jong, 2018). These management tasks are to be accomplished by one individual while simultaneously that individual is responsible for the accountability expectations of high-stakes testing and for the learning of each student (Doerksen & Wise, 2016). The multifaceted nature of these responsibilities can lead to role overload and burnout. Small school leaders must skillfully manage their time and energy, prioritize tasks effectively, and delegate responsibilities when possible. This challenge emphasizes the importance of developing leadership teams and cultivating a collaborative culture within the school to distribute the workload and enhance the overall organizational efficiency, including the managerial task of the budget.

Budget. Budgetary constraints have compelled school districts to make challenging decisions regarding reduced funding, and, as a response, some districts have opted for dual-role administrators. The concept of dual-role administrative positions was recognized as suboptimal several decades ago. Woll (1988) reported that individuals serving in dual roles are faced with multiple responsibilities of two positions, resulting in a prioritization of their time, which led to many important duties being unfulfilled. Doerksen and Wise (2016) reaffirmed the challenges of such positions, stating that the multiple roles and responsibilities can interfere with the leadership ability and effectiveness of administrators who are attempting to fulfill the obligations of two positions.

Every school had financial struggles, but when the budget is predicated off enrollment, small rural schools are the first to struggle. The dual-role administrator does save money for the district, but at a cost. This cost is usually burnout of the position or the position being seen as a steppingstone to move into a higher role at a larger district. To keep a person in this position may require an approach focused on things other than monetary rewards.

Conclusion

Several contextual factors shape superintendent longevity, including state and federal education policies, school board dynamics, and evolving community expectations. In Oregon, school districts operate under state regulations while managing local funding constraints, teacher shortages, and political pressures—all of which can contribute to superintendent turnover. Dr. McBride, in her study on superintendent longevity in Oregon, highlights that “failure to identify and address these factors will likely result in continued superintendent turnover, instability in district leadership in public K-12 schools in Oregon, and uncertainty for Oregon students, staff, families, and communities.”

At the national level, changing educational policies, increasing demands for accountability, and heightened political polarization add further complexity to the role. A report by the RAND Corporation (2023) notes that "politics is the top reason superintendents are stressed," indicating that the current political climate significantly impacts superintendent tenure. By examining these factors within the Oregon context and comparing them to national trends, I seek to provide insights into the conditions that support superintendent retention and long-term educational leadership stability.

CHAPTER III

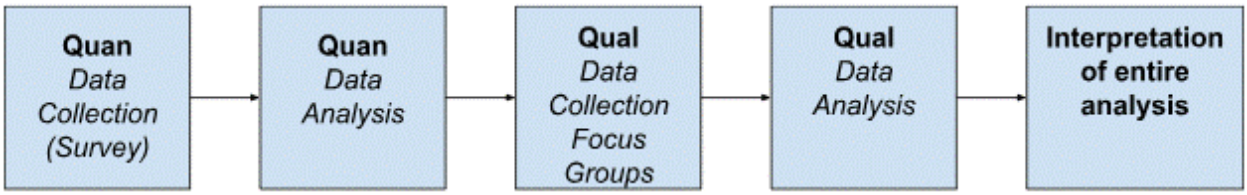
METHOD

In this study, I gathered quantitative and qualitative data to investigate factors influencing the longevity of superintendents in public schools. I selected a sequential explanatory mixed-method design to identify trends through statistical analysis and then to examine more deeply the underlying causes and experiences using qualitative methods. A survey served as the initial data collection stage. Survey results provided guidance in the selection of participants for focus group interviews.

This study's methodology followed Creswell's (2009) mixed-methods framework, with the qualitative data analyzed after the quantitative data. Figure 1 displayed a visual model of the sequential explanatory design used in this study.

Figure 1

Visual Model of the Study's Sequential Explanatory Design



The emphasis on qualitative analysis was highlighted by "QUAL" in bold and capital letters. The process began with quantitative data collection and analysis, which informed the focus of the subsequent qualitative phase. Insights gained from the initial analysis informed the design of focus group interviews, ensuring that the qualitative data collected in the second stage provided a deeper context and understanding of the findings.

Setting

This study examined the longevity of school superintendents, focusing on school districts in Oregon. The research setting included a diverse range of school districts, from small rural communities to large urban schools, providing a comprehensive view of the factors that influence superintendent tenure. Oregon, with its 197 school districts, served as a case study, offering insights into how geographic, economic, and political conditions impacted superintendent longevity.

The selected setting was relevant because superintendent stability has direct implications for educational leadership, district performance, and student achievement. Oregon presented an especially compelling case due to its mix of urban and rural districts, varying student populations, and diverse socioeconomic conditions. While some rural superintendents served longer because of community ties and fewer political pressures, urban districts tended to experience higher turnover rates due to greater public scrutiny, larger budgets, and complex governance structures (edweek.org, 2022). By studying Oregon alongside national trends, I aimed to uncover patterns of why superintendents were staying in the profession despite ongoing challenges. I also sought to reveal patterns related to longevity, key challenges, and effective retention strategies.

Demographically, Oregon's school districts vary significantly in size. The state's largest district serves over 44,000 students, whereas many rural districts educate fewer than 250 (Oregon.gov). Nationally, similar disparities exist. Socioeconomic factors also play a role, as districts with higher poverty rates often experience greater leadership turnover due to funding challenges and heightened accountability pressures. A study by the Wisconsin Policy Forum (2022) found that "districts serving student populations with more than 50% from low-income

households saw higher-than-average rates of superintendent turnover at 18.7%, compared to 15.1% at other districts." In this study, I explored how factors such as district size, funding levels, and community engagement influenced superintendent tenure.

Participants

The participants in this study included current school superintendents from Oregon, representing a diverse range of school district sizes, geographic locations, and demographic contexts. In selecting participants, I aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing superintendent longevity and why they remained in the profession.

Superintendents from urban, suburban, and rural school districts were recruited to capture varied leadership experiences. Oregon has 197 public school districts, ranging from small rural schools with fewer than 250 students to large urban districts like Portland Public Schools, serving over 44,000 students (Oregon.gov). Superintendents from different district types were purposefully sampled to explore how district size, community expectations, funding levels, and governance structures impacted tenure.

Participants were recruited through professional organizations such as the Oregon Association of School Executives (OASE) and the Coalition of Oregon School Administrators (COSA). COSA, located in Salem, Oregon, is the leading administrator facilitator in Oregon, helping aspiring superintendents obtain licensure, and the majority of Oregon superintendents are part of this organization. COSA offers a superintendent academy where aspiring superintendents complete a two-year program at the University of Oregon (UO) to meet licensure requirements set by the Teacher Standards and Practices Commission (TSPC).

I used a purposive snowball sampling method to identify superintendents with varying tenure lengths, leadership experiences, and district characteristics. By recruiting a diverse group

of superintendents from Oregon, this study aimed to provide a nuanced understanding of the personal, organizational, and systemic influences on superintendent longevity.

Sources of Data

This study on the longevity of superintendents relied on multiple sources of data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing tenure in the role. Data sources include an online survey and focus group interviews. Each source is described in detail below.

Survey

An online survey I designed for this study served as a primary data source. The survey consisted of 20 questions developed to assess factors contributing to superintendent longevity, professional experiences, and personal perspectives on leadership challenges. The survey had not been used in prior research; rather, it was developed specifically to address the research questions for this study. The survey included both closed- and open-ended questions to allow for quantitative and qualitative analysis.

The survey was administered using Google Forms, ensuring ease of access and user-friendly interaction for participants. To maximize response rates, an initial email invitation containing the survey link was sent to superintendents through COSA. Follow-up reminder emails were sent at one-week and two-week intervals. Participation in the survey was voluntary, and all responses remained confidential. To ensure anonymity, no personally identifiable information was collected unless participants voluntarily chose to provide contact details for follow-up interviews. The estimated completion time for the survey was approximately 10–20 minutes. The multiple-choice questions used response options of *strongly agree*, *agree*, *neutral*, *disagree*, and *strongly disagree*.

The questions included in the survey were:

1. Do you consent to participate in this study?
2. What is the size of your district?
3. How many years have you served as a superintendent?
4. My relationship with the school board is built on mutual trust and open communication.
5. I feel valued and supported by the community I serve as superintendent.
6. Community and board partnerships contribute significantly to my desire to remain in this position.
7. I continue in this role because I believe my leadership directly improves student outcomes.
8. The sense of making a positive difference in my district motivates me to stay in the profession.
9. My personal mission aligns closely with the vision and goals of the district.
10. I have sufficient autonomy to make leadership decisions that reflect my professional judgment.
11. Opportunities for professional growth and learning contribute to my satisfaction as superintendent.
12. I feel encouraged to innovate and lead new initiatives without excessive constraints.
13. I have developed effective strategies to manage stress and maintain balance in my role.
14. My ability to recover from challenges and setbacks has contributed to my longevity in this position.
15. The district culture allows me to maintain a healthy balance between professional and personal life.
16. A clear and shared district vision has strengthened my commitment to remain in this role.

17. Stability in leadership teams and district direction supports my continued service as superintendent.
18. My long-term goals for the district align with my personal leadership philosophy.
19. What aspects of your work give you the greatest sense of purpose or fulfillment as a superintendent?
20. What personal or professional strategies have helped you sustain resilience and avoid burnout in this demanding role?

Survey data were collected over a four-week period, after which responses were analyzed using descriptive statistical analyses for quantitative data and thematic coding for qualitative responses.

Data Collection Plan: Superintendent Longevity – Survey Section

This section outlined the step-by-step process for survey data collection, specifying timeframes, details of data recorded, and procedures for ensuring validity and reliability.

Step 1: Survey Development (December 13-27, 2025)

This study defined several key research areas related to superintendent longevity. These areas include job satisfaction and stress levels, leadership strategies for sustainability, board relations and political navigation, community engagement and stakeholder management, and work–life balance alongside personal well-being. Questions were carefully designed to capture these dimensions accurately.

Question Type Selection and Validation

A mixed approach to question types were used to balance breadth and depth. Likert-scale items (1–5) captured attitudes and experiences, while multiple-choice questions gathered demographic details such as years in role, district size, and funding levels. Open-ended questions

allowed for deeper qualitative insights into longevity factors. The survey was pilot-tested with 3–5 experienced superintendents to ensure clarity and relevance. Feedback from the pilot informed refinement of question wording.

Step 2: Survey Distribution (January 9-16, 2026)

The target participants include current and former superintendents. The goal was to obtain 50-75 responses across urban, suburban, and rural districts to ensure a representative sample, which 92 superintendents responded. The survey was distributed using digital platforms such as Google Forms or SurveyMonkey. Participants were recruited via email through professional networks (OASE, COSA).

Step 3: Data Collection and Recording (January 19-23, 2026)

Digital surveys automatically log responses into Google Sheets, enabling real-time tracking of participation. Raw data was exported to Excel for further analysis and coding. Collected data fields included demographic information (years of experience, district size), retention factors (satisfaction, leadership support, community relations), stress and work–life balance measures (burnout, workload, personal well-being), and open-ended responses on challenges and strategies for longevity. Data integrity was maintained by identifying and removing incomplete or duplicate responses and checking for patterns of inauthentic responses.

Step 4: Data Analysis (January 26-February 6, 2026)

The quantitative analysis involved descriptive statistics (mean, median, mode) to detect trends in Likert-scale items. Correlation analysis explored relationships, such as between board support and superintendent longevity. Qualitative analysis entailed coding open-ended responses into themes related to leadership support, job stress, and resilience strategies. Word-frequency analysis tools assisted in identifying common terminology within superintendent narratives.

Validation of results occurred through cross-verification with interview data from Otter.ai transcripts.

Step 5: Reporting Findings (February 9-13, 2026)

A comprehensive report was compiled, featuring graphs and charts to visualize quantitative data and direct quotes from open-ended responses to highlight qualitative themes. The report distilled key factors contributing to superintendent longevity. Findings were presented to stakeholders, including state education agencies, leadership training programs, and school board associations.

Interviews

In addition to the survey, I conducted semi-structured interviews through an online video conferencing platform such as Google Meet to gain deeper insights into the lived experiences of superintendents. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and was recorded with the consent of the participants for transcription and analysis through Otter.ai.

The interviews followed a semi-structured format, allowing for flexibility in responses while ensuring key topics were covered. The selection of interview participants was based on survey responses. Approximately 20–25 interviews were conducted with a diverse representation of superintendents from varying district sizes, geographic locations, and years of experience.

Participants were provided with an interview protocol in advance outlining the purpose of the study, confidentiality assurances, and key topics to be discussed. The interviews focused on personal reflections on superintendent longevity, leadership strategies, challenges faced, and the role of relationships with school boards and communities. The interview questions included:

1. Strong Relationships with School Boards and Communities

1. How have your relationships with your school board and community influenced your decision to remain in your current superintendent role?
2. Can you describe specific ways that the board or community has supported your effectiveness and job satisfaction?

2. Sense of Purpose and Impact

1. What aspects of your work give you the greatest sense of purpose or fulfillment as a superintendent?
2. How do your feelings about students, staff, or the community affect your commitment to stay in the profession?

3. Professional Growth and Autonomy

1. Describe how much professional autonomy you have in your job.
2. How does that impact your satisfaction?
3. Describe what opportunities for professional growth, mentorship, or innovation you have in your job?
4. How do these affect your longevity in educational leadership?

4. Resilience and Work-Life Balance Strategies

1. What personal or professional strategies have helped you avoid burnout in this demanding role?
2. How has that balance affected your decision to remain in the position?

5. Leadership Vision and Stability

1. How important is it to have a clear vision for your district?
2. How has this shaped your desire to continue leading it?
3. What role does leadership stability—both your own and that of your administrative team—play in your decision to stay in your position or the profession?

After the interviews were conducted, recordings were transcribed in preparation for analysis to identify recurring themes, patterns, and insights. The findings from the interviews were incorporated with survey data to develop a comprehensive understanding of superintendent longevity.

Data Collection Plan: Superintendent Longevity

Step 1: Identifying Participants (March 9-13, 2026)

In the first phase, a purposeful list of 30-34 current superintendents was assembled to reflect diversity in district size, demographics, and geographic location. Participants were required to be acting superintendents in their role to ensure meaningful insights on longevity. Potential participants were identified using public school directories, professional associations (e.g., OASE, COSA), and peer referrals. Once identified, each superintendent received an email invitation that outlines the purpose of the study, expectations for participation, and explanations of how Otter.ai will be used to record and transcribe interviews.

Step 2: Scheduling Interviews (March 16-20, 2026)

Participants who consent were scheduled for a one-hour, semi-structured interview using scheduling tools such as Google Calendar or Calendly. Interviews were conducted via Google Meet whenever possible, with telephone or in-person formats offered as alternatives to accommodate participant preferences. Integration of Otter.ai with Google Meet were verified to ensure accurate and automatic transcription during the sessions.

Step 3: Conducting and Recording Interviews (March 23-April 3, 2026)

Each focus group interview began with a brief introduction, the verbal securing of informed consent to record, and confirmation of participant confidentiality. Otter.ai was launched to provide a live transcript of the interview. The semi-structured guide included prompts such as leadership strategies for longevity, resilience in the face of challenges, board relations and political climate management, and focus on work–life balance and well-being all under the purview of why the superintendents stay in their profession.

Step 5: Thematic Analysis (March 23-April 4, 2026)

Data was organized into thematic categories such as institutional support (e.g., board relations, mentorship), personal resilience (e.g., stress management, family support), and community/political navigation (e.g., stakeholder relationships).

Step 6: Reporting Findings (Week 12-14)

A comprehensive synthesis of findings was drafted, identifying key factors linked to superintendent longevity. Representative quotes were included to illustrate themes. Results will be compared with existing literature to situate the findings within broader scholarship on superintendent tenure. The final product included an executive summary and supporting

presentation tailored for stakeholders such as school boards and leadership development organizations.

Data Analysis Plan

I analyzed the data collected for this study on superintendent longevity using a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing tenure. The analysis was conducted in multiple phases, each addressing different aspects of the research questions. This data analysis plan ensured a rigorous and systematic approach to understanding superintendent longevity. By combining statistical analysis, thematic coding, and document review, the study provided a rich, multidimensional perspective on the factors influencing tenure in educational leadership.

Survey Data Cleaning and Preparation

All survey responses were reviewed to ensure completeness and consistency, adhering to established mixed-methods protocols (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Incomplete or duplicate entries might still offer valuable insights and were considered thoughtfully, recognizing that partial responses can contribute meaningful information. To enable statistical analysis, categorical variables, such as tenure length, district size, and geographic location, were systematically coded.

Survey Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, means, standard deviations, and percentages, were calculated for each survey item (e.g., Likert-scale and demographic questions). These statistics supported trend analysis in superintendent tenure, particularly in relation to demographic factors such as years of experience, district size, and location.

Interview Data Analysis

The focus group interviews were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify recurring patterns and themes. Transcripts were reviewed multiple times to ensure familiarity with the data. Coding was conducted to identify recurring patterns and themes related to superintendent longevity. To develop the main thematic findings, I examined the coded data to identify recurring themes related to superintendent longevity, leadership challenges, and effective strategies. By systematically comparing responses across participants, I highlighted both shared patterns and distinctive variations. This comparative approach enriched the analysis by illuminating common experiences as well as individual differences within the dataset.

Triangulation

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, I triangulated the focus group interview data with survey responses (Patton, 2015). This method involved cross-checking the insights gained from different data streams, thereby verifying consistency and identifying any discrepancies. By integrating multiple sources of evidence, the study presented a more robust and comprehensive understanding of superintendent longevity.

Integration of Findings

The final stage of analysis integrated quantitative and qualitative findings to develop a comprehensive understanding of superintendent longevity. This involved: (a) Comparing Survey and Focus Group Interview Results: Examining how statistical trends align with personal narratives from interview participants, and (b) Developing an Explanatory Framework: Constructing a model explaining the key determinants of superintendent longevity, supported by both numerical and thematic evidence.

Minimizing Threats to Internal Validity and Increasing Research Integrity

As with all research studies, it is important that steps be taken to minimize threats to internal validity and increase research integrity and trustworthiness. Some of the most important threats to internal validity include selection bias, instrumentation, and response bias. I discuss each of these threats and the steps I took to reduce the threat.

Selection Bias

This study utilized voluntary survey participation, which led to self-selection bias, where individuals with strong opinions or unique experiences are more likely to respond (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002). To mitigate this, a diverse and representative sample was targeted through stratified sampling across various district sizes and geographic locations.

Instrumentation

An important source of data in this study was a survey which I developed for use in my dissertation. If survey questions are unclear or misinterpreted, results may lack reliability. To reduce this threat to internal validity, the survey reviewed in a pilot test with 2-3 superintendents who will not be participating in the study, which I used their feedback to refine survey items (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Response Bias

In spite of my attempts to ensure that people provide truthful responses to the survey and when participating in interviews and focus groups, participants might have provided socially desirable answers rather than truthful responses. Anonymity and confidentiality assurances were emphasized to reduce this risk (Podsakoff et al., 2003). In addition, at the start of each focus group interview, I emphasized the importance of sharing their experiences truthfully rather than

saying what they think I might want to hear. Using open-ended, non-leading questions also helped maintain authenticity (Maxwell, 2013).

Researcher Bias

To address researcher bias through collaborative qualitative analysis, the following plan outlined the use of multiple coders and structured comparison methods grounded in Lincoln and Guba's (1985) trustworthiness framework.

Generalizability

Although triangulation with the survey helped enhance external validity (Patton, 2015), findings from a small sample may not generalize to all superintendents. The smaller and less representative of the sample, the more guarded we must be when attempting to generalize the findings from this study.

Enhancing Research Integrity and Credibility

I took numerous steps to enhance the research integrity of my study and the credibility of my findings. Ethical guidelines, including informed consent and data confidentiality, were strictly followed (American Educational Research Association [AERA], 2011). To ensure plausibility and relevance, I aligned the research questions with real-world challenges in educational leadership, ensuring practical significance (Yin, 2018). To increase credibility, I used data triangulation to validate findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Finally, this topic is of practical significance. Superintendent longevity is a critical issue impacting district stability and student outcomes, reinforcing the study's value (Fullan, 2014).

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors influencing superintendent longevity, with a particular focus on understanding why superintendents remain in their roles despite increasing demands, political pressures, and role complexity. Prior research has emphasized superintendent turnover as a persistent challenge, especially in rural contexts where leadership continuity is essential (Arnold et al., 2004; Tobin, 2006). This study extends that work by focusing on the conditions that support superintendents in sustaining their leadership.

A sequential explanatory mixed-methods design was employed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Quantitative survey data were collected from superintendents across Oregon (n = 92) to identify patterns associated with longevity. These findings informed a qualitative phase consisting of nine focus group interviews with 34 superintendents, designed to explore and explain the survey results in greater depth.

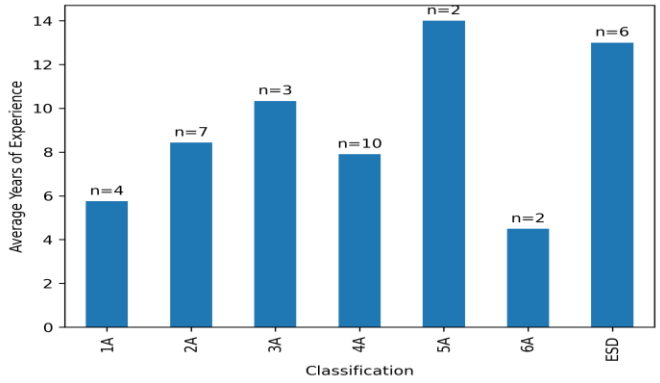
This chapter presents the results in three sections: (a) participant demographics, (b) quantitative survey findings, and (c) qualitative thematic findings. The integration of these data sources provides a comprehensive understanding of superintendent longevity.

Participant Demographics

Participants in this study represented superintendents from across Oregon and included a range of district sizes and levels of experience. For the purposes of this study, years refers to the average number of years of experience as a superintendent, and classification (1A-6A) refers to the size of the school district, with 1A representing the smallest districts and 6A representing the largest. In addition, several participants served in Education Service Districts (ESDs), which provide regional support services (see Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1

Average Years of Superintendent Experience by District Classification (with Sample Sizes)

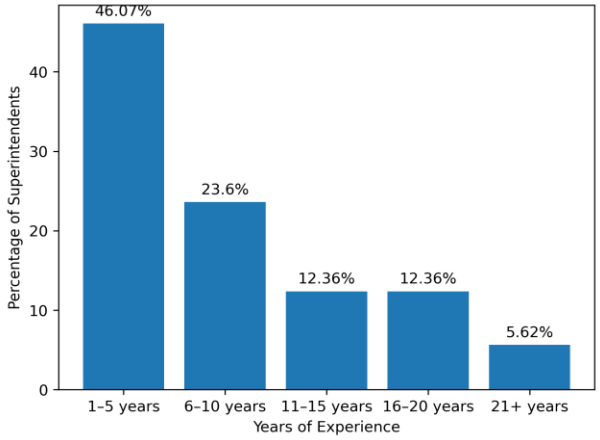


Note. Bars represent average years of experience. Sample size (*n*) is displayed above each classification.

A total of 92 superintendents participated in the survey. Participants represented a range of experience levels: 46.07% reported 1 to 5 years, 23.60% reported 6 to 10 years, 12.36% reported 11 to 15 years, 12.36% reported 16 to 20 years, and 5.62% reported 21 or more years of experience (see Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2

Distribution of Superintendent Experience Levels



Note. Percentage of superintendent participants (n = 92) by years of experience.

This distribution reflects multiple career stages and aligns with research indicating that superintendents' experiences and challenges evolve over time (Grissom et al., 2021). The inclusion of both early-career and experienced leaders provides a broad perspective on factors influencing longevity.

Quantitative Survey Findings

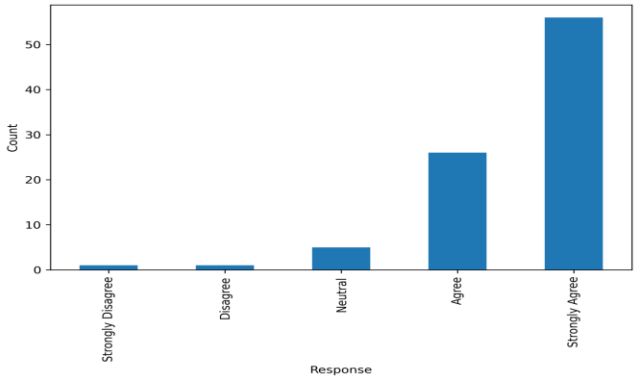
In this section, I report survey findings, organized by responses to each question.

School Board Relationships and Community Support

Survey results indicate that 92.13% of respondents (n = 82) *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that their relationship with the school board is built on trust and open communication (see Figure 4.3).

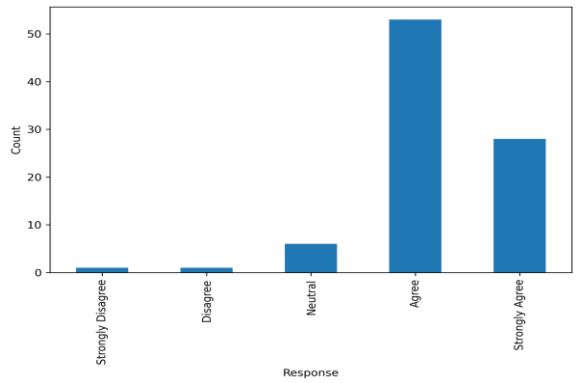
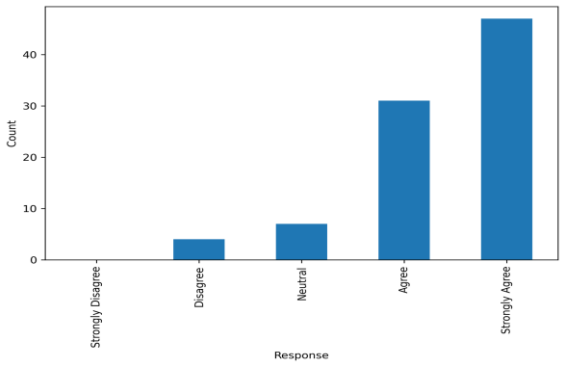
Figure 4.3

Superintendent perceptions of trust and communication with school boards.



Note. Distribution of responses to the statement: "My relationship with the school board is built on mutual trust and open communication."

Additionally, 91.01% (n = 81) reported feeling valued and supported by their communities (see Figure 4.4), reinforcing the importance of community relationships in sustaining leadership. Further, 87.64% (n = 78) indicated that board-community partnerships influence their decision to remain in the role (see Figure 4.5).

Figure 4.4	**Figure 4.5**
Superintendent perceptions of community support.	*Influence of board-community partnerships on superintendent retention.*
	
Note. Distribution of responses to the statement: "I feel valued and supported by my community."	**Note.** Distribution of responses to the statement: "Partnerships between the board and community influence my decision to remain in this role."

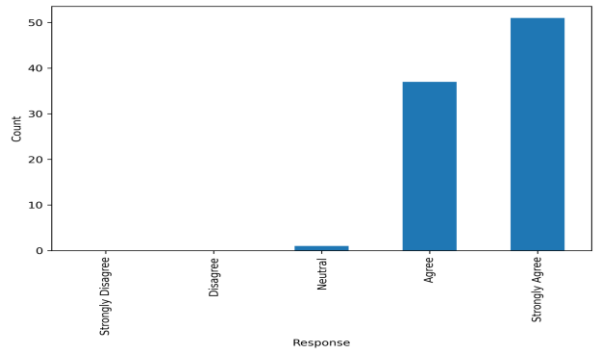
Purpose and Student-Centered Leadership

Survey findings demonstrate near-universal agreement regarding the role of purpose. A total of 98.87% (n = 91) of respondents *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that they remain in their role because their leadership improves student outcomes (see Figure 4.6), indicating strong alignment

between purpose and professional motivation. Additionally, 100% (n = 92) reported that making a positive difference motivates them to stay in the profession (see Figure 4.7).

Figure 4.6

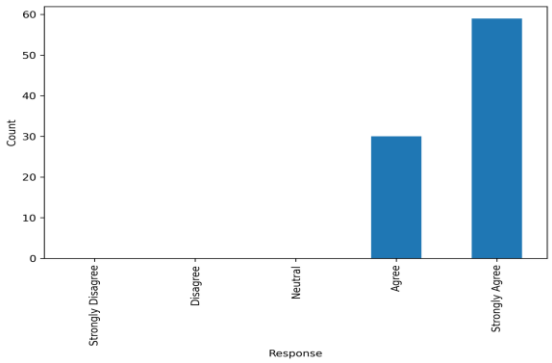
Perceived impact of leadership on student outcomes.



Note. Distribution of responses to the statement: "My leadership directly improves student outcomes."

Figure 4.7

Motivation to remain in the superintendency based on making a difference.



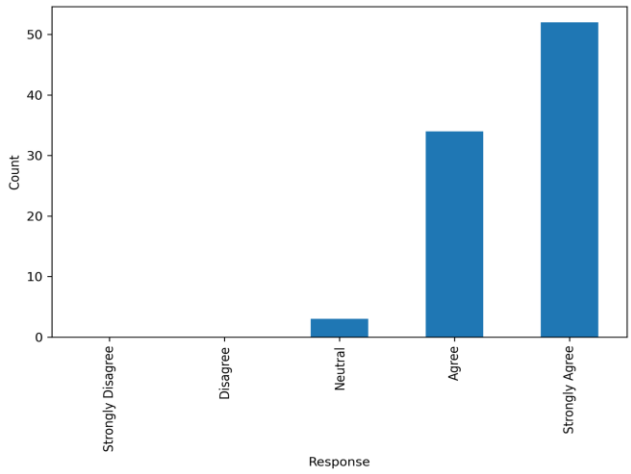
Note. Distribution of responses to the statement: "Making a positive difference motivates me to stay in this role."

Autonomy and Professional Agency

Survey responses indicate that 96.63% (n = 86) of respondents *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that they have sufficient autonomy to make leadership decisions (see Figure 4.8). However, a total of 76.40% (n = 68) of respondents reported positive perceptions of professional growth opportunities (see Figure 4.9), though variability suggests differences across districts.

Figure 4.8

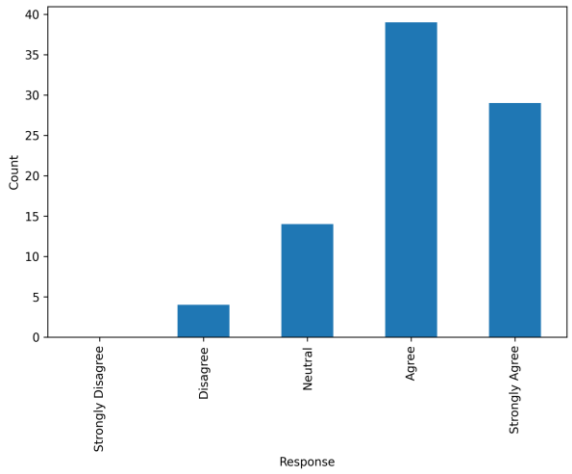
Perceived autonomy in superintendent decision-making.



Note. Distribution of responses to the statement: "I have sufficient autonomy to make leadership decisions."

Figure 4.9

Perceptions of professional growth opportunities.

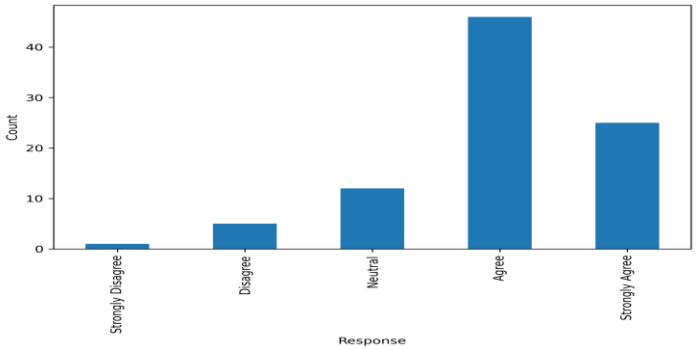


Note. Distribution of responses to the statement: "Opportunities for professional growth contribute to my satisfaction."

Similarly, 79.78% (n = 71) reported feeling encouraged to innovate (see Figure 4.10).

Figure 4.10

Encouragement of innovation in superintendent roles.



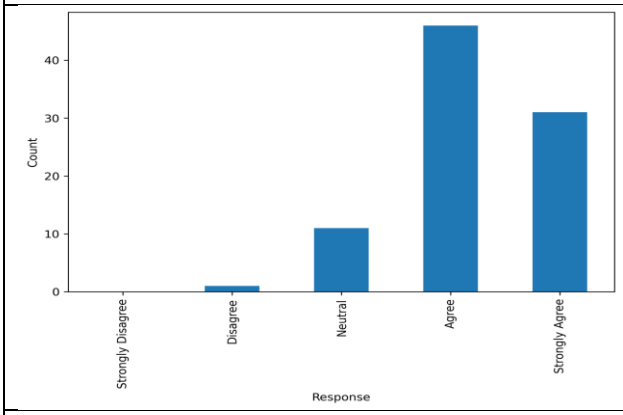
Note. Distribution of responses to the statement: "I feel encouraged to innovate in my role."

Resilience and Work-Life Balance

Survey findings indicate that 86.52% (n = 77) of respondents *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that their ability to recover from challenges and be resilient contributed to their longevity (see Figure 4.11). However, only 48.32% (n = 43) reported strong confidence in their ability to manage stress (see Figure 4.12), and work-life balance responses were more varied, with 53.93% (n = 48) reporting positive experiences (see Figure 4.13).

Figure 4.11

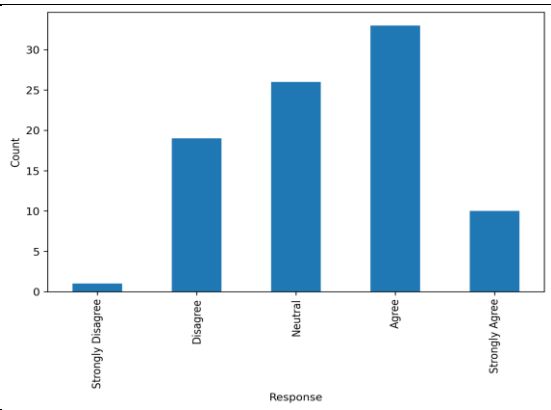
Self-perceived resilience among superintendents.



Note. Distribution of responses to the statement: "I consider myself resilient in this role."

Figure 4.12

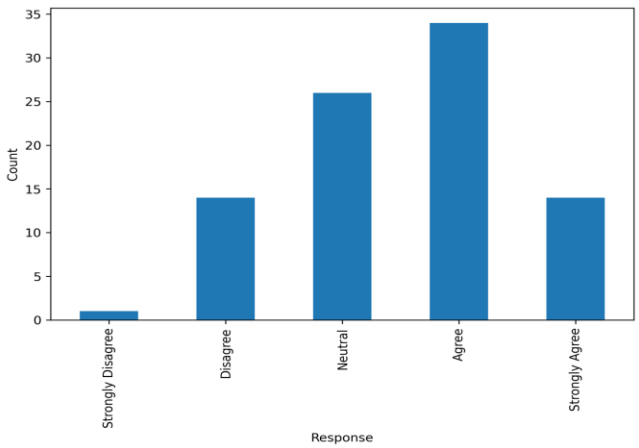
Confidence in stress management strategies.



Note. Distribution of responses to the statement: "I have effective strategies to manage stress."

Figure 4.13

Perceptions of work-life balance.



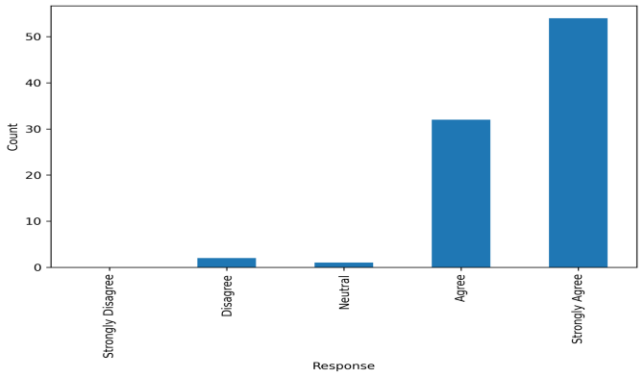
Note. Distribution of responses to the statement: "My district supports a healthy work-life balance."

Vision and Stability

Survey results indicate that 71.91% (n = 64) of respondents *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that a clear and shared vision strengthens their commitment, and similar levels were reported for leadership stability (see Figure 4.14).

Figure 4.14

Alignment between superintendent values and district vision.



Note. Distribution of responses to the statement: "My personal values align with the district vision."

Qualitative Findings

Although survey data provided a broad understanding of superintendent experiences, it did not fully capture how these factors are experienced in practice. To further explore these findings, I conducted nine focus groups with a total of 34 superintendents. These discussions provided deeper insight into the relational, personal, and contextual dynamics underlying the survey results. The qualitative findings both supported and expanded upon the quantitative patterns, revealing how these factors interact to influence superintendent longevity. Seven themes emerged from the focus group data.

Theme 1: School Board Relationships as the Primary Anchor

Nearly three-quarters of participants identified school board relationships as having a strong or critical influence on their decision to remain in the superintendency (see Table 4.4). These responses align with the high percentage of participants (47.06%) who identified board relationships as critically influential. Superintendents described these relationships as foundational to both their effectiveness and their longevity.

One superintendent from a 3A district in Northeast Oregon explained that "if I did not have such a good board that has an aligned vision and supports what I do and trusts the work that I do, I would not stay in this position," while a superintendent from a 2A district in Eastern Oregon noted that "without that kind of support from my board, I would have been gone in the last year without a doubt." These statements reflect the critical nature of board alignment and trust. Participants also emphasized the relational and political complexity of working with boards, with a superintendent from a 4A district in Western Oregon stating that "you are always four votes away from looking for a new job, so you have to build individual relationships with each board member." Another superintendent from a 1A district in Central Oregon reinforced

this point by sharing that "my board has kept me in this position because if I had different board members, I probably would not still be here," while a superintendent from a 5A district in Northwest Oregon added that "if you do not have a good relationship with your board, then it is not any fun at all and people do not want to stay in the role."

Table 4.4
Influence of School Board Relationships on Superintendent Retention

Level	*n*	%
Minimal	0	0.00
Some	2	5.88
Moderate	6	17.65
Strong	10	29.41
Critical	16	47.06

Note. Responses to the question: How have your relationships with your school board influenced your decision to stay? Percentages based on n = 34.

Theme 2: Sense of Purpose and Responsibility to Students

Nearly all participants reported a strong or deep sense of purpose, with 82.35% identifying purpose as a strong or deeply influential factor (see Table 4.5). This distribution suggests that purpose is not a peripheral aspect of the role, but rather a central driver of how superintendents experience their work and sustain themselves over time. Unlike other factors that varied across contexts, the consistency of responses in the strong and deep categories indicates that purpose is widely shared among participants, regardless of district size or years of experience.

Superintendents consistently described their motivation as rooted in their responsibility to students. A superintendent from a 3A district in Northeast Oregon shared that "knowing our kids and being able to name most of them reminds me that they matter the most," illustrating how personal connections reinforce a sense of purpose. A superintendent from a 4A district in Southern Oregon emphasized milestone moments, stating that "watching kids walk across the stage is what makes this work worth it," while a superintendent from a 5A district in Northwest

Oregon explained that "every decision I make comes back to what is best for kids." Additional participants highlighted the sustaining nature of purpose, noting that "the work is hard, but the outcomes for students make it worth it" (Superintendent, 2A district, Eastern Oregon) and that "when students come back and thank you years later, that is what keeps you going" (Superintendent, 1A district, Central Oregon).

Table 4.5

Sense of Purpose Related to Student Impact

Level	*n*	%
Minimal	0	0.00
Limited	1	2.94
Moderate	5	14.71
Strong	12	35.29
Deep	16	47.06

Note. Responses to the question: What aspects of your work with students give you the greatest sense of purpose? Percentages based on $n = 34$.

Theme 3: Community Connection and Identity

Commitment to students and community appears to be strongly connected to superintendent longevity, with over 76% of participants identifying commitment as *strong* or *critical* (see Table 4.6). These findings suggest that commitment is deeply rooted in both professional responsibility and personal connection.

A superintendent from a 2A district in Eastern Oregon explained that "this district is my home, and that makes it hard to leave," while a superintendent from a 3A district in Northeast Oregon stated that "we are interwoven throughout the entire community," emphasizing the embedded nature of the superintendent role. Additional participants highlighted the visibility and

interconnectedness of leadership, noting that "people see you as part of everything that happens in the community" (Superintendent, 4A district, Western Oregon). Others reinforced the personal dimension of the role, sharing that "I built my life here, and that makes this work personal" (Superintendent, 1A district, Central Oregon) and that "you feel a responsibility to the people you serve every day" (Superintendent, 5A district, Northwest Oregon).

Table 4.6

Community Connection and Commitment

Level	*n*	%
Minimal	0	0.00
Some	2	5.88
Moderate	6	17.65
Strong	11	32.35
Critical	15	44.12

Note. Responses to the question: How does your connection to your community influence your commitment? Percentages based on $n = 34$.

Theme 4: Autonomy as a Superintendent

Autonomy appeared to be a meaningful factor in superintendent satisfaction, with over 49% of participants identifying their level of autonomy as *high* or *very high* (see Table 4.7). An additional 26.47% reported *moderate* autonomy, suggesting that while most superintendents experience some level of independence in decision-making, the degree to which autonomy is exercised varies across contexts.

Participants frequently described autonomy as both empowering and complex. A superintendent from a 2A district in Northwest Oregon explained, "I enjoy the challenge of getting board members aligned and working toward the same goals," highlighting how autonomy is often exercised within the context of collaboration rather than isolation. Similarly, a

superintendent from a 1A district in Eastern Oregon stated, “Not everybody is going to be happy, and part of the job is learning how to navigate that,” reinforcing that autonomy involves making difficult decisions while balancing multiple perspectives.

Several participants emphasized the importance of autonomy in maintaining a sense of professional agency. A superintendent from a 2A district in Eastern Oregon noted, “You have to make decisions every day that impact people, and that responsibility is part of the role,” illustrating how autonomy is directly tied to leadership responsibility. A superintendent from an Education Service District (ESD) in Oregon added, “I have had to learn to trust others in areas where I am not the expert,” demonstrating that autonomy also involves knowing when to rely on others. Participants who reported moderate levels of autonomy often described external constraints, particularly related to board dynamics or community expectations. One superintendent from a 4A district in Western Oregon shared, “There are times where you feel like your decisions are influenced more by others than by what you believe is best,” reflecting the moderate category represented in the data. Another superintendent from a 4A district in Oregon explained, “You have autonomy, but it depends on the situation and the level of trust that exists,” suggesting that autonomy is fluid rather than fixed.

For those reporting limited autonomy, the challenges were more pronounced. A superintendent from a smaller district in Oregon noted, “When you do not feel like you can make decisions independently, it becomes difficult to lead effectively,” highlighting how reduced autonomy can impact both satisfaction and effectiveness. Overall, the findings suggest that while autonomy is present for most superintendents, its variability across contexts influences how it contributes to longevity.

Table 4.7

Autonomy in Superintendent Decision-Making

Level	*n*	%
Low	3	8.82
Limited	5	14.71
Moderate	9	26.47
High	10	29.41
Very High	7	20.59

Note. Responses to the question: How would you describe your level of autonomy? Percentages based on $n = 34$.

Theme 5: Resilience in the Face of Challenges

Resilience was one of the most critical factors influencing superintendent longevity, with over 61% of participants identifying *strong* or *high* levels of resilience (see Table 4.8). These findings underscore the demanding nature of the role and the need to develop strategies to navigate ongoing challenges.

A superintendent from a 4A district in Western Oregon stated that "you are going to get kicked in the teeth every day in this job," and further emphasized that "this is a very lonely job." Others described the emotional and political pressures of the role, noting that "communities can come unglued when tough decisions are made" (Superintendent, 3A district, Northeast Oregon). Additional participants emphasized the need for adaptive strategies, explaining that "there are constant challenges, but you learn how to handle them over time" (Superintendent, 2A district, Eastern Oregon), and that "you have to learn how to manage stress or you will burn out" (Superintendent, 5A district, Northwest Oregon). Another superintendent added that "there are

days where the pressure feels overwhelming, but you still have to show up and lead" (Superintendent, 1A district, Central Oregon).

Table 4.8

Resilience in Managing Superintendent Challenges

Level	*n*	%
None	1	2.94
Limited	4	11.76
Moderate	8	23.53
Strong	11	32.35
High	10	29.41

Note. Responses to the question: How would you describe your ability to manage challenges? Percentages based on $n = 34$.

Theme 6: Professional Growth and Fulfillment

Professional growth was present across participants, though with greater variability than other factors (see Table 4.9). While 46.06% of participants reported *strong* or *high* levels of growth, a notable portion (23.53%) identified growth as *limited* or *nonexistent*, indicating that opportunities for development are not uniformly experienced.

A superintendent from a 2A district in Eastern Oregon stated that "you are constantly learning in this role," while another from a 4A district in Western Oregon noted that "the challenges keep the work interesting." Others emphasized the developmental nature of the position, explaining that "you grow as a leader every year you are in this position" (Superintendent, 3A district, Northeast Oregon), and that "building the right team is one of the most important parts of this work" (Superintendent, 5A district, Northwest Oregon). Additional

participants highlighted the need for adaptability, noting that "you have to keep adapting to stay effective" (Superintendent, 1A district, Central Oregon).

Table 4.9

Professional Growth and Development Opportunities

Level	*n*	%
None	2	5.88
Limited	6	17.65
Moderate	10	29.41
Strong	9	26.47
High	7	20.59

Note. Responses to the question: How would you describe opportunities for professional growth? Percentages based on $n = 34$.

Theme 7: Superintendent Vision

Vision is a highly valued component of superintendent leadership, with over 67% of participants identifying it as very important or essential (see Table 4.10). These findings suggest that having a clear direction for the district plays a significant role in sustaining leadership. Participants consistently described vision as a guiding force. A superintendent from a 5A district in Central Oregon stated, "I have always seen this role as building the community, not just leading a school system," illustrating how vision extends beyond organizational goals. While a 4A district in Western Oregon added, "You have to be engaged with people regularly if you want to build trust," emphasizing the relational component of vision. Several participants highlighted the importance of clarity and alignment. One superintendent noted, "If you do not have a clear vision, it is hard to move the district forward," while another stated, "Vision gives purpose to the

work and helps people stay focused." These responses align with the very important and essential categories reflected in the data.

Participants in the moderate category acknowledged the importance of vision but described challenges in maintaining it. One shared, "Vision can shift depending on the circumstances," while another explained, "It is important, but it has to be adaptable." These responses reflect the variability captured in the table. Overall, the data suggests that vision is a critical component of leadership that contributes to both direction and sustainability in the superintendency.

Table 4.10

Importance of Vision

Level	*n*	%
Not	1	2.94
Slight	3	8.82
Moderate	7	20.59
Very	12	35.29
Essential	11	32.35

Note. Responses to the question: How important is having a clear vision? Percentages based on $n = 34$.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors influencing superintendent longevity, with a specific focus on rural and small school districts. While prior research has largely emphasized superintendent turnover, often highlighting instability, burnout, and political pressures, this study instead focused on understanding what sustains superintendents in their roles. This shift aligns with broader leadership literature that calls for a deeper understanding of sustainability in leadership rather than solely focusing on attrition (Kowalski, 2013). In rural schools, where leadership roles are expanded and resources are often limited, understanding longevity becomes extremely critical.

Using a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), this study integrated quantitative survey data with qualitative insights from focus group interviews. This methodological approach is consistent with Creswell's assertion that combining quantitative breadth with qualitative depth provides a more comprehensive understanding of complex leadership phenomena. The triangulation of data sources strengthens the findings and allows for a more nuanced understanding of superintendent experiences.

The findings revealed seven interconnected themes that collectively explain superintendent longevity: school board relationships, purpose, community connection, relational leadership, resilience, professional growth, and trust through communication. These findings reflect established leadership research highlighting the importance of relational trust, moral purpose, and organizational conditions in sustaining leadership (Fullan, 2014; Kowalski, 2013). Rather than functioning independently, these themes operate as an interconnected system, reinforcing the idea that leadership sustainability is multidimensional and context-dependent.

School Board Relationships as the Primary Anchor

The most significant finding of this study is the central role of school board relationships in superintendent longevity. Participants consistently identified trust, alignment, and communication with the board as the most influential factors in their decision to remain in their roles. This finding directly aligns with findings reported by Tekniepe (2015), who emphasized that effective governance relationships reduce conflict and enhance leadership stability. Collectively, board relationships are not merely supportive conditions, but rather the primary anchor that determines superintendent longevity.

This study extends that work by demonstrating that board relationships are not merely supportive but often determinative. When alignment and trust are present, superintendents experience stability and clarity. When they are absent, the likelihood of turnover increases. This finding reinforces recommendations found in the broader leadership literature suggesting that relational trust is foundational to organizational effectiveness (Fullan, 2014). In rural districts, where relationships are more visible and personal, this dynamic becomes even more pronounced, and strong board relationships are widespread and not confined to specific districts.

Additionally, an important implication emerging from this study is the need for superintendents to intentionally manage, guide, and train their school boards rather than assuming board members automatically understand effective governance practices. Many participants discussed the reality that school board members often enter their roles with limited formal training in educational governance, superintendent evaluation, strategic planning, or the distinction between governance and day-to-day management. As a result, successful superintendents frequently described the importance of proactively building governance capacity within their boards through communication, transparency, and ongoing education. Participants

described practical strategies such as developing superintendent-board operating agreements that clearly defined communication norms, decision-making processes, and governance expectations. Others emphasized the importance of holding regular board work sessions focused on district goals, student data, strategic planning progress, and role clarification rather than relying solely on formal board meetings for discussion. Superintendents also highlighted the importance of transparency through consistent updates, detailed communication, and openly discussing challenges before they escalated into conflict.

Several participants further noted that managing board relationships begins before accepting a superintendent position. They emphasized the importance of doing extensive homework on the district and board prior to interviewing, including reviewing board meeting minutes, understanding community dynamics, researching turnover history, and asking direct questions during the interview process regarding board expectations, communication styles, governance philosophy, and previous superintendent transitions. Participants explained that these conversations often helped determine whether the superintendent-board relationship would be a strong professional fit.

Collectively, participants emphasized that strong superintendent-board relationships did not occur accidentally; rather, they were intentionally cultivated through trust-building, strategic communication, governance development, and proactive relationship management. These findings suggest that superintendent longevity may be strengthened when leaders view board development and relationship management as essential responsibilities of the superintendent role itself rather than solely the responsibility of outside organizations or formal board training programs.

Purpose as a Sustaining Force

A second key finding is the role of purpose as a sustaining force in the superintendency. Participants consistently described their work as being driven by a deep commitment to students and long-term community outcomes. This finding aligns closely with Fullan's (2014) concept of moral purpose, which positions student-centered leadership as a critical driver of sustained educational improvement. Taken together, these findings indicate that purpose is not simply a motivator, but a stabilizing force that sustains superintendents through the complexities of the role.

This study builds on that foundation by demonstrating that purpose functions not only as motivation but also as a stabilizing force. The strength of agreement across participants indicates that purpose is a central and unifying factor in superintendent longevity. In environments characterized by increasing accountability pressures and political complexity, purpose provides clarity and direction. As suggested in leadership literature, leaders who maintain a strong sense of purpose are better equipped to navigate challenges and sustain their work over time (Fullan, 2014).

Community Connection and Identity

My findings also highlight the importance of community connection, particularly in rural settings. Participants described their leadership as deeply embedded within their communities, reflecting a strong sense of identity and belonging. This finding aligns with Arnold et al.'s (2004) research that emphasized the importance of place-based leadership in rural education and the role of community in shaping leadership experiences.

This study extends that perspective by demonstrating that community connection is a key factor in retention. Superintendents who feel connected to their communities are more likely to

remain in their roles, even when faced with challenges. This finding reinforces the idea that leadership in rural contexts is inherently relational and that community engagement is not just a leadership strategy, but a sustaining condition. Overall, community connection functions as a powerful anchor that strengthens commitment and contributes to superintendent longevity.

Resilience in the Face of Role Complexity

Another critical finding is the role of resilience in sustaining superintendents. Participants consistently described the role as complex and demanding, particularly in rural districts where leaders often assume multiple responsibilities. This finding aligns with Tobin's (2006) research, which described the expectation for leaders to manage competing demands and operate across multiple roles.

This study contributes to the literature by emphasizing that resilience is essential for longevity. Participants described resilience as a skill developed through experience, relationships, and intentional reflection. This finding supports broader leadership research suggesting that resilience is a key component of effective leadership in complex environments (Kowalski, 2013). Resilience is not an optional trait but a necessary condition for sustaining leadership in complex and evolving environments. Rather than avoiding challenges, superintendents develop the capacity to navigate them.

The Role of Organizational Conditions

The findings also underscore the importance of organizational conditions, including autonomy, professional growth, and leadership stability in helping to promote superintendent longevity. These factors align with Kowalski's (2013) emphasis on the role of organizational structures in supporting effective leadership. Superintendents who experience autonomy are better able to exercise professional judgment and maintain engagement in their work.

Opportunities for professional growth, even when self-directed, contribute to continued development.

Growth is often self-directed and embedded within the work itself rather than externally structured. This aligns with leadership development literature emphasizing continuous learning and adaptive leadership (Kowalski, 2013). Taken together, these findings indicate that while professional growth contributes to engagement and fulfillment, it functions as a secondary and context-dependent factor in superintendent longevity.

Stability within leadership teams and governance structures further supports longevity by creating consistency and reducing uncertainty. These findings reinforce the importance of organizational conditions as a foundation for sustained leadership.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study have important implications for practice. For school boards, the results reinforce Tekniepe's (2015) assertion that governance relationships are central to leadership stability. Boards must prioritize trust-building, clear communication, and alignment around shared goals to support superintendent longevity. For superintendents, the findings align with Fullan's (2014) emphasis on moral purpose and relational leadership. Leaders must remain grounded in their purpose, invest in relationships, and develop resilience strategies that allow them to sustain their work over time. In rural settings, where role complexity is heightened, these strategies become even more critical. For leadership preparation programs, the findings support Kowalski's (2013) argument that leadership development must extend beyond technical skills to include relational and contextual competencies. Preparation programs should focus on governance dynamics, community engagement, and resilience to better prepare leaders for long-term success.

Grounding Leadership in Purpose, Relationships, and Resilience

The findings of this study suggest that superintendent longevity is sustained not through the absence of stress or conflict, but through intentional practices that help leaders remain grounded in purpose, relationships, and resilience. Participants repeatedly described the importance of staying connected to the "why" behind the work, particularly through direct relationships with students, staff, and community members.

For many superintendents, being grounded in purpose meant intentionally remaining visible within schools and communities despite increasing managerial and political demands. Participants discussed attending student activities, visiting classrooms, greeting students by name, and maintaining direct interaction with staff as strategies that helped reconnect them to the meaningful aspects of leadership. These actions served as reminders that their work extended beyond governance and operational management and remained centered on students and communities.

Participants also emphasized the importance of relationships as a sustaining force within the role. Strong relationships with leadership teams, neighboring superintendents, mentors, and trusted colleagues created opportunities for support, collaboration, and reflection. Superintendents described peer networks and professional relationships as critical mechanisms for processing stress, navigating political pressures, and avoiding professional isolation.

At the same time, participants identified several factors that negatively affected sustainability. Superintendents who became isolated from students and staff, consumed entirely by operational demands, or disconnected from supportive relationships described significantly higher levels of emotional exhaustion and burnout. Participants also discussed the challenge of

attempting to satisfy all stakeholder groups simultaneously, often resulting in stress, decision fatigue, and frustration.

The findings further suggest that resilience is not an innate characteristic, but rather a learned and continually developed leadership capacity. Participants described resilience as being strengthened through adversity, mentorship, reflection, and experience. Practices such as maintaining family time, exercise, professional collaboration, and personal boundaries were repeatedly identified as important strategies for sustaining leadership over time.

Overall, the findings indicate that superintendent longevity is strengthened when leaders intentionally remain connected to purpose, invested in relationships, and proactive in building systems of personal and professional resilience.

Managing and Developing School Board Relationships

One of the strongest findings throughout this study involved the importance of school board relationships in sustaining superintendent longevity. Participants consistently described trust, communication, and alignment with school boards as foundational conditions for leadership stability. The findings suggest that superintendent longevity is significantly influenced not only by board relationships themselves, but by the superintendent's ability to intentionally guide, educate, and develop governance practices with board members.

Several participants emphasized the importance of proactive communication and relationship-building with individual board members. Rather than waiting for conflict to emerge, successful superintendents described intentionally maintaining consistent communication, clarifying expectations, and developing mutual understanding regarding governance roles and district priorities.

Participants also discussed the importance of training and educating school boards on governance responsibilities, strategic planning, communication expectations, and operational boundaries. Superintendents noted that board instability, lack of governance understanding, and unclear expectations often created conflict and leadership turnover. In contrast, boards that received consistent guidance and governance support were more likely to establish stable working relationships with superintendents.

The findings suggest that superintendent preparation programs and professional organizations should place greater emphasis on board-superintendent relationship development, governance training, conflict navigation, and communication systems. Leadership sustainability appears closely connected to the superintendent's ability to cultivate relational trust while helping boards remain focused on governance rather than day-to-day management.

Ultimately, participants described school board relationships not simply as professional interactions, but as the organizational anchor that either stabilizes or destabilizes superintendent leadership over time.

Architecture of Superintendent Longevity

The findings from this study suggest that superintendent longevity functions as an interconnected leadership ecosystem rather than a collection of isolated variables. The "architecture of longevity" identified through this study consists of seven interconnected factors: school board relationships, purpose-centered leadership, community connection, relational trust, resilience, professional growth, and vision.

Figure 4.15

Architecture of Superintendent Longevity



Note. The figure illustrates how relational trust, moral purpose, and organizational conditions interact collectively to support sustained superintendent leadership and longevity.

The findings suggest that these factors reinforce one another rather than operate independently. For example, resilience is strengthened through strong relational support systems, while purpose is reinforced through visible student impact and community connection. Similarly, board trust and communication create organizational stability that allows superintendents to focus on long-term leadership rather than political survival.

This systems-based framework demonstrates that superintendent longevity is not simply about enduring pressure, but about sustaining relational, organizational, and personal conditions that support effective leadership over time.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study highlights several areas for future research. Additional research comparing superintendent longevity across rural and urban contexts would build on Arnold et al. (2004)

work by examining how place-based factors influence leadership sustainability. Further exploration of board–superintendent relationships could extend Tekniepe's (2015) work by examining how trust and alignment develop over time. Research on resilience and well-being would also contribute to the growing body of leadership literature emphasizing sustainability in complex roles (Kowalski, 2013). The experience of managing stress and maintaining balance is less consistent. This reflects increasing demands and pressures associated with the superintendency (RAND, 2023).

Future research should continue examining superintendent longevity through multiple contextual and organizational lenses. First, additional studies should examine superintendent longevity in states outside Oregon to determine whether the themes identified in this study remain consistent across different political, geographic, and governance contexts. Comparative studies between rural, suburban, and urban districts may further clarify how contextual variables influence superintendent sustainability differently across settings.

Second, future studies should examine the relationship between school board governance training and superintendent retention. Because board relationships emerged as one of the strongest findings in this study, additional research should explore how governance development, board onboarding processes, communication systems, and role clarity influence superintendent stability over time.

Third, future research should examine superintendent mental health, wellness, and emotional resilience more deeply. Participants consistently described emotional fatigue, political pressure, and role overload associated with the position. Additional studies focused specifically on burnout prevention, stress management strategies, and organizational wellness supports may provide important insight into sustaining educational leaders.

Fourth, future studies should explore superintendent longevity across career stages. Early-career superintendents may experience leadership challenges differently than veteran superintendents, particularly in relation to political navigation, confidence, resilience development, and work-life balance. Examining these differences may help improve mentoring and leadership preparation programs.

Fifth, future research should investigate the relationship between superintendent longevity and long-term district outcomes such as organizational culture, staff retention, student achievement, community trust, and strategic plan implementation. Greater understanding of these relationships may further reinforce the importance of leadership stability within school systems.

Finally, future studies should explore how mentorship networks, regional superintendent collaboration, and professional organizations contribute to leadership sustainability. Participants in this study repeatedly emphasized the importance of peer support and professional relationships as critical factors in maintaining resilience and navigating the complexity of the role.

Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this study. First, this study focused exclusively on superintendents in Oregon, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other states or regions with different governance structures, funding systems, and political environments. Although Oregon provides a valuable context due to its significant number of rural school districts, superintendent experiences may differ across states and educational systems.

Second, participation in both the survey and focus group phases was voluntary, creating the possibility of self-selection bias. Superintendents who chose to participate may have had

stronger professional engagement, more positive experiences, or greater interest in superintendent longevity than those who declined participation.

Third, the qualitative findings relied on self-reported perceptions and lived experiences. Although participants provided rich and meaningful reflections, responses may have been influenced by memory recall, personal interpretation, or social desirability bias. The findings therefore represent participants' perspectives regarding superintendent longevity rather than objective measures of leadership effectiveness.

Additionally, the study included superintendents with varying levels of experience, district size, and geographic context. While this diversity strengthened the breadth of perspectives represented, it also introduced variability in leadership experiences that may not fully reflect the realities of every superintendent context.

Finally, superintendent longevity is influenced by numerous external factors beyond the scope of this study, including political shifts, economic conditions, changing state policies, enrollment trends, and community dynamics. Although this study identified several interconnected themes contributing to superintendent sustainability, these findings should be interpreted within the broader complexity of educational leadership environments.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the field of educational leadership by reframing how superintendent tenure is understood. While much of the existing research has focused on why superintendents leave, often emphasizing instability and external pressures, this study instead highlights the conditions that support longevity. This shift aligns with broader leadership research that emphasizes sustainability, relational trust, and moral purpose as essential components of effective leadership (Fullan, 2014; Kowalski, 2013).

At the center of superintendent longevity is the strength of relationships, particularly the relationship between the superintendent and the school board. Consistent with Tekniepe's (2015) findings, this study confirms that trust, alignment, and communication within governance structures are critical to leadership stability. However, the findings go further by demonstrating that these relationships are often the deciding factor in whether superintendents remain in their roles. Leadership does not occur in isolation, and sustainability is fundamentally relational.

Equally important is the role of purpose. As Fullan (2014) describes, moral purpose serves as a driving force in educational leadership, and this study reinforces that idea. Superintendents who maintain a strong focus on students and long-term impact are better able to navigate the complexities of the role. Purpose provides clarity, direction, and stability in an environment that is often unpredictable and demanding.

In rural contexts, leadership is deeply connected to community. Consistent with Arnold et al.'s (2004) research, this study highlights the importance of place-based leadership and the role of community identity in shaping leadership experiences. Superintendents who feel connected to their communities are more likely to remain in their roles, not because the work is easier, but because it is more meaningful. This sense of connection reinforces commitment and strengthens leadership sustainability.

The complexity of the superintendent role cannot be overlooked. As Tobin (2006) noted, leaders are often required to manage multiple responsibilities simultaneously, and this is especially true in rural districts. This study reinforces that resilience is essential for navigating this complexity. Superintendents who develop resilience through experience, relationships, and reflection are better positioned to sustain their leadership over time.

Organizational conditions also play a critical role in supporting longevity. Consistent with Kowalski (2013), this study highlights the importance of autonomy, professional growth, and leadership stability. These factors create the conditions in which leaders can thrive, even in challenging environments. Without these supports, sustaining leadership becomes significantly more difficult.

Ultimately, this study demonstrates that superintendent longevity is not the result of a single factor, but rather the interaction of relationships, purpose, resilience, and organizational conditions. These elements work together to create a system that supports sustained leadership. Superintendents do not remain in their roles because the work is easy, but because the work is meaningful, the relationships are strong, and the conditions allow them to continue leading effectively.

From a practical standpoint, these findings provide clear direction for improving leadership stability. School boards must prioritize relationship-building and alignment. Preparation programs must focus on developing relational and adaptive leadership skills. Superintendents must remain grounded in their purpose and intentional in their approach to leadership.

In the end, superintendent longevity matters. Leadership stability impacts organizational coherence, community trust, and ultimately student outcomes. In rural districts, where leadership transitions can have significant consequences, understanding and supporting longevity becomes even more important. This study contributes to that understanding by highlighting not just the challenges of the role, but the conditions that allow leaders to stay and succeed.

APPENDIX A

Superintendent Survey

Superintendent Longevity

When you submit this form, it will not automatically collect your details like name and email address unless you provide it yourself.

* Indicates required question

Informed Consent Form

Please read the informed consent form below and then select your response.

UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

Consent for Research Participation

Title: Superintendent Longevity

Researcher(s): Casey Hallgarth, University of Oregon

Researcher Contact Info: 541-786-3276, hallgart@uoregon.edu

You are being asked to participate in a research study. The box below highlights key information about this research for you to consider when making a decision whether or not to participate. Carefully consider this information and the more detailed information provided below the box. Please ask questions about any of the information you do not understand before you decide whether to participate.

Key Information for You to Consider

- **Voluntary Consent.** You are being asked to volunteer for a research study. It is up to you whether you choose to participate or not. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled if you choose not to participate or discontinue participation.
- **Purpose.** The purpose of this research is to learn more about factors and dispositions that help keep superintendents in their roles.
- **Duration.** It is expected that your participation will last no more than 90 minutes.
- **Procedures and Activities.** You will be asked to complete a brief online survey and participate in a focus group with other superintendents. An additional individual interview may be scheduled if needed to provide additional insight.
- **Risks.** Some of the foreseeable risks or discomforts of your participation include possible discomfort reflecting on challenges that you have encountered as superintendent.
- **Benefits.** Some of the benefits that may be expected include connecting with other superintendents and learning more about what helps them remain in their positions.
- **Alternatives.** Participation is voluntary and the only alternative is to not participate.

What happens to the information collected for this research?

Information collected for this research will be used for a doctoral dissertation. Deidentified information collected might also be used in future articles or conference presentations.

How will my privacy and data confidentiality be protected?

We will take measures to protect your privacy including removing your name and the names of your school and/or district and replacing them with code numbers. All recording and transcripts will be stored on a password protected laptop. Recordings will be stored on a password protected laptop untill I have transcribed the recordings. Once transcriptions have been verified for accuracy (approximately two weeks), the recordings will be deleted. Despite taking steps to protect your privacy, we can never fully guarantee your privacy will be protected.

We will take measures to protect the security of all your personal information including reminding focus group participants to respect the confidentiality of everything shared in the focus group. Despite these precautions to protect the confidentiality of your information, we can never fully guarantee confidentiality of all study information.

Individuals and ~~organization~~ that conduct or monitor this research may be permitted access to and inspect the research records. This may include access to your private information and transcripts from focused groups and interviews as well as deidentified survey responses. These individuals and organizations include:

- The Institutional Review Board (IRB) ~~that~~ reviewed this research
- Identifiers will be removed from identifiable private information collected in this research. After removal of identifiers, the information may be used for future research without obtaining additional consent.

What if I want to stop participating in this research?

Taking part in this research study is your decision. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You do not have to take part in this study, but if you do, you can stop at any time. You have the right to choose not to participate in any study activity or completely withdraw from continued participation at any point in this study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship with the researchers or the University of Oregon.

Will I be paid for participating in this research?

You will receive no payment for participating in this research.

Who can answer my questions about this research?

If you have questions, concerns, or have experienced a research related injury, contact the research team at:

Casey Hallgarth
541-786-3276
hallgart@uoregon.edu

An Institutional Review Board ("IRB") is overseeing this research. An IRB is a group of people who perform independent ~~review~~ of research studies to ensure the rights and welfare of participants are protected. UO Research Compliance Services is the office that supports the IRB. If you have questions about your rights or wish to speak with someone other than the research team, you may contact:

Research Compliance Services
5237 University of Oregon
Eugene, OR 97403-5237
(541) 346-2510

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

I have had the opportunity to read and consider the information in this form. I have asked any questions necessary to make a decision about my participation. I understand that I can ask additional questions throughout my participation.

I understand that by clicking 'agree' below, I volunteer to participate in this research. By consenting to participate, I agree to audio and video recording of the focus group/interview via Zoom.

___ I agree to participate

___ I do not agree to participate

1. **Do you consent to participate in this study? ***

   Mark only one oval.

   - ◯ Yes, I consent to participate.
   - ◯ No, I do not consent (please close your browser to exit this survey).

2. **1. School District Name**

   _____

3. **2. What is the size of your district? ***

   Mark only one oval.

   - ◯ Small (0-1,650 students)
   - ◯ Medium (1,651-9,999 students)
   - ◯ Large (10,000+ students)

4. **3. How many years have you been a Superintendent?** *

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ 1 - 5 years
- ◯ 6 - 10 years
- ◯ 11 - 15 years
- ◯ 16 - 20 years
- ◯ 21+ years

5. **4. My relationship with the school board is built on mutual trust and open communication.** *

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Strongly Agree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Neutral
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly Disagree

6. **5. I feel valued and supported by the community I serve as superintendent.** *

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

7. **6. Community and board partnerships contribute significantly to my desire to remain in this position.** *

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

8. **7. I continue in this role because I believe my leadership directly improves student outcomes.** *

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

9. **8. The sense of making a positive difference in my district motivates me to stay in the profession.** *

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

10. **9. My personal mission aligns closely with the vision and goals of the district.** *

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

11. **10. I have sufficient autonomy to make leadership decisions that reflect my professional judgment.** *

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

12. **11. Opportunities for professional growth and learning contribute to my satisfaction as superintendent.** *

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

13. **12. I feel encouraged to innovate and lead new initiatives without excessive constraints.** *

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

14. **13. I have developed effective strategies to manage stress and maintain balance in my role.** *

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

15. **14. My ability to recover from challenges and setbacks has contributed to my longevity in this position.** *

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

16. **15. The district culture allows me to maintain a healthy balance between professional and personal life.** *

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

17. **16. A clear and shared district vision has strengthened my commitment to remain in this role.** *

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

18. **17. Stability in leadership teams and district direction supports my continued service as superintendent.** *

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

19. **18. My long-term goals for the district align with my personal leadership philosophy.** *

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

20. In terms of importance to you in supporting your continued service as superintendent, select the **top three** items from the list below: *

Check all that apply.

- [ ] Feeling valued and supported by the community.
- [ ] Feeling valued and supported by the school board.
- [ ] Knowing my leadership directly improves student outcomes.
- [ ] Knowing I'm making a positive difference in my district.
- [ ] The alignment between my personal mission and the district's vision and goals.
- [ ] The autonomy to make leadership decisions that reflect my professional judgment.
- [ ] Opportunities for professional growth and learning.
- [ ] The freedom to innovate and lead new initiatives without excessive constraints.
- [ ] Receiving a high salary and good benefits.
- [ ] A district culture that allows me to maintain a healthy balance between professional and personal life.
- [ ] Stability in leadership teams and district direction.

21. **19. What aspects of your work give you the greatest sense of purpose or fulfillment as a superintendent?**

22. **20. What personal or professional strategies have helped you sustain resilience and avoid burnout in this demanding role?**

23. **21.** If you would be willing to participate in an interview to further discuss your experiences as a superintendent, please provide your contact information below. Otherwise, leave blank. *

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

24. **22. Name**

_____

25. **23. Email Address**

_____

26. **24. Phone number**

_____

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APPENDIX B

Focus Group Interview Questions

1. Strong Relationships with School Boards and Communities

1. How have your relationships with your school board and community influenced your decision to remain in your current superintendent role?

2. Can you describe specific ways that the board or community has supported your effectiveness and job satisfaction?

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2. Sense of Purpose and Impact

1. What aspects of your work give you the greatest sense of purpose or fulfillment as a superintendent?

2. How do your feelings about students, staff, or the community affect your commitment to stay in the profession?

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3. Professional Growth and Autonomy

1. Describe how much professional autonomy you have in your job.

2. How does that impact your satisfaction?

3. Describe what opportunities for professional growth, mentorship, or innovation you have in your job?

4. How do these affect your longevity in educational leadership?

---

4. Resilience and Work-Life Balance Strategies

1. What personal or professional strategies have helped you avoid burnout in this demanding role?

2. How has that balance affected your decision to remain in the position?

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5. Leadership Vision and Stability

1. How important is it to have a clear vision for your district?

2. How has this shaped your desire to continue leading it?

3. What role does leadership stability—both your own and that of your administrative team—play in your decision to stay in your position or the profession?

APPENDIX C

Focus Group Follow-Up Interview Questions

1. Strong Relationships with School Boards and Communities

Follow-Up Questions:

1. Can you share an example of a time when your relationship with the board or community directly influenced your decision to stay or consider leaving?

2. How do trust and communication with your board and community evolve over time, and how does that impact your leadership experience?

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2. Sense of Purpose and Impact

Follow-Up Questions:

1. Can you describe a specific moment or experience that reaffirmed your purpose as a superintendent?

2. How has your sense of purpose changed or evolved throughout your time in the superintendency?

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3. Professional Growth and Autonomy

Follow-Up Questions:

1. How does the level of autonomy you experience influence your ability to lead effectively and stay motivated in your role?

2. Can you describe a time when professional growth or a learning opportunity significantly impacted your decision to remain in the profession?

---

4. Resilience and Work-Life Balance Strategies

Follow-Up Questions:

1. Can you describe a particularly challenging time in your role and how you navigated it?

2. What systems or supports have been most critical in helping you maintain balance and avoid burnout?

---

5. Leadership Vision and Stability

Follow-Up Questions:

1. How does seeing progress toward your district vision influence your commitment to stay in the role?

2. In what ways does stability—or instability—within your leadership team affect your long-term decision-making about staying in the profession?

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