

An Analysis of Florida Educators' Perceptions of the School Superintendency,  
Qualifications, Leadership Skills, Longevity, and Student Achievement:  
A Quantitative Study

by  
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## **Approval Page**

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## Statement of Original Work

I declare the following:

I have read the Code of Student Conduct and Academic Responsibility as described in the *Student Handbook* of Nova Southeastern University. This applied dissertation represents my original work, except where I have acknowledged the ideas, words, or material of other authors.

Where another author's ideas have been presented in this applied dissertation, I have acknowledged the author's ideas by citing them in the required style.

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June 30, 2022  
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***I dedicate this work, with great love and gratitude, to my wife, Michelle Whitco, and to my parents, Lillian Raimondi Bruzzese and Joseph Bruzzese***

## **Abstract**

An Analysis of Florida Educators' Perceptions of the School Superintendency, Qualifications, Leadership Skills, Longevity and Student Achievement: A Quantitative Study. Natalie Patricia Whitco, 2022: Applied Dissertation, Nova Southeastern University, Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and School of Criminal Justice. Keywords: school superintendent, qualifications, leadership skills, longevity, student achievement, Florida

High turnover in the role of school superintendent signaled functional disruption, decreased morale and impaired student achievement. The principal researcher sought to explain perceptions among professional Florida K-12 public school educators about key factors related to the role of school superintendent, necessary qualifications, important leadership skills, longevity and its impact on student achievement.

The principal researcher disseminated a 10-question online self-administered survey she developed for the study to a sample of 199 professional Florida K-12 public school educators. Independent demographic variables among sample participants included: gender, current job, highest level of completed education and years of experience as an educator. Dependent variables included: qualifications, leadership skills, longevity and student achievement. In this her final report, the principal researcher documented the problem, presented a literature review and research methodology, reported descriptive analysis of simple frequencies for guiding research question one and reported findings of nonparametric Kruskal -Wallis  $H$  testing for guiding research questions two through five. Current job was statistically significant in sample participant perceptions. School teachers rated a doctoral degree in education, 10+ years' experience in education and experience in the same district more highly as necessary qualifications for school superintendent candidates than did school and district leaders. School teachers also rated advocating for employees, trust and confidence in employees and fairness and integrity more essential than did school and district leaders, as important leadership skills related to school superintendent longevity. School leaders rated longevity and student achievement more essential than did school teachers and district leaders, as factors related to the role of school superintendent. School leaders also rated classroom teachers experience more highly than did school teachers and district leaders as a necessary qualification for school superintendent candidates. Finally, school leaders rated more highly than school teachers and district leaders a four-to-10-year term of service for school superintendents for maximum impact on student achievement. Discussion, elaboration and interpretation of findings, implications of findings and recommendations for future research are included herein.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Statement of the Problem**

Recruiting and retaining, with longevity, qualified men and women in the role of school superintendent has been a problem in the United States (Bollinger & Grady, 2018; Goyle, 2020; Grissom & Mitani, 2016; Hackett, 2015; Kamler, 2009; Kominiak, 2016; Sampson, 2018; Wright, 2017). In professional K-12 public education, employees in key positions, in particular the school superintendent, must possess appropriate leadership skills for the hiring school board and school district. High job stress and low job satisfaction among men and women selected for the role of school superintendent has led to high frequency turnover, conflict and disruption through diminished personnel support resulting in impaired school district culture and climate and decreased student achievement (Bell, 2019; Bollinger & Grady, 2018; Bridges, Plancher & Toledo, 2019; Hart, Schramm-Possinger, & Hoyle, 2019; Henrikson, 2018; Plotts & Gutmore, 2014). School boards and school districts must proactively plan how to handle these changes (Grier, 2015; Hackett, 2015; Morris, Lummis, Lock, Ferguson, Hill, & Nykiel, 2019; Rothwell, Stavros & Sullivan, 2016).

Job stress and job satisfaction affect working men and women in the United States. Even seasoned and well-qualified job candidates chosen for employment roles suffer employment stress and dissatisfaction, causing them to leave their roles. High rates of turnover in key supervisory, management and administrative positions can negatively affect organizational morale and productivity throughout employee ranks.

Despite the development of attractive compensation and benefits packages for school superintendents in many school districts in the United States, including relocation

expenses (Glass, 2005), many men and women selected for the role of school superintendent have not enjoyed great longevity in the hiring district. (Grissom & Anderson, 2012). While some retired from the field, many chose to leave hiring districts in favor of accepting a competing job offer elsewhere. In some instances, school boards asked men and women selected for the role of school superintendent to leave.

Many individuals perceive employment decisions involving the school superintendent, including the selection and evaluation process, as inherently political in nature. School boards may find that those selected for the role of school superintendent do not possess the right combination of qualifications and leadership skills to adequately suit school district needs at a given time. In school districts where school boards appointed men and women to the role of school superintendent, school boards strived to negotiate suitable performance goals for the appointee (Eadie, 2003). In appointive school districts, boards monitored the proficiency of school superintendent appointees in achieving negotiated performance goals prior to and throughout the duration of appointees' employment contracts (Morgan, 2003). In elective school districts, board supervision was frequently lacking.

Researchers often disagreed about critical issues in the field and possessed different perceptions about relationships, if any, between school superintendent qualifications, leadership skills, longevity and its impact on student achievement. Through the identification, evaluation and analysis of school superintendent qualifications, leadership skills, longevity and its impact on student achievement, researchers explained contractions and growth in personnel support, organizational culture and climate and student achievement. For example, Marzano and Waters, (2006)

described a positive correlation between improved leadership skills in a particular school superintendent and increased student achievement (pp. 10-11). Candidates perceived as lacking critical qualifications and leadership skills in the hiring school district, at any given time, did not achieve longevity and thus failed to reach negotiated and long-term performance and student achievement goals. This in turn negatively impacted school districts' bottom lines, employee morale and the overall organizational well-being.

### ***The Topic***

The pressures involved in school improvement reforms in the U.S., including increased accountability for academic gains, increased visibility and increased vulnerability among men and women in the role of school superintendent led to decreased longevity and increased turnover (Kamler, 2009). Candidates perceived as lacking germane leadership skills in a given school district at a given time were held accountable for poor student achievement. Frequent turnover among short-term school superintendents adversely impacted personnel support, organizational cultures and climates and student achievement. Effective school boards and school districts promote organizational learning and development their responses to change (Rothwell, Stavros & Sullivan, 2016).

Researchers examined the concept of longevity among men and women in the role of school superintendent through both quantitative and qualitative lenses. Regardless of selected research lenses, controversy and debate persisted about the level of longevity required for a school superintendent to implement, monitor and tweak educational initiatives to maximize school improvement efforts and enrich long-term student achievement. Researchers concluded, too many school superintendents in a given school

district in too few years was functionally disruptive and adversely impacted personnel support, organizational culture and climate (including teacher morale) and student achievement (Giaquinto 2011). Conversely, too few school superintendents in too numerous years often signaled perceptions of stagnancy and complacency when student achievement failed to grow. Within both appointive and elective school districts, educational researchers demonstrated interest in studying school superintendent longevity.

Some state governance systems proscribed predetermined terms for men and women in the role of school superintendent, evidenced by school district policy and relevant state law and regulations. In some states, school districts and school boards appointed men and women to the role of school superintendent with the discretion to determine and negotiate individual contract terms with each appointee (Kamler, 2009). School boards and respective members in appointive school districts were responsible to play an active part in: a) selecting and supervising school superintendent appointees; b) negotiating performance targets for appointees; and c) assessing appointee performance (Eadie, 2003). In 2019, a majority 41 out of the total 67 school superintendents in the state were elected pursuant to the Florida Department of Education (FLDOE) website (<https://www.fldoe.org/accountability/data-sys/school-dis-data/superintendents.shtml>). By 2022, the majority of elected school superintendents in Florida decreased to 38 out of the total 67 (<https://www.fldoe.org/accountability/data-sys/school-dis-data/superintendents.shtml>).

In school districts where school boards appointed men and women to the role of school superintendent, school boards terminated many appointees before the completion

of mutual performance on a given appointee's employment contract. In contrast, many male and female school superintendent appointees resigned prior to the competition of mutual performance on their employment contracts. Early terminations and resignations resulted were disruptive and costly.

### ***The Research Problem***

Many men and women selected for the role of school superintendent in school districts in the United States failed to enjoy optimized levels of personnel support, positive organizational cultures and climates and failed to attain the longevity required to achieve long-term negotiated goals, including goals for student achievement. To advance the study of this problem, the principal researcher explored and examined extant literature related to the role of school superintendent in the United States.

The principal researcher delved pointedly into literature that would form the basis for her own study instrument. She reviewed and read selected publications including, but not limited to books, journal articles and reports regarding the historical context for both education and the role of school superintendent in the United States, including education and philosophy, democracy and debate, policy and funding, school improvement reform, accountability and high-stakes testing and the evolving nature of the role in the face of change. She also closely read publications documenting professional standards for the role of School Superintendent and studies involving school superintendent qualifications, including educational backgrounds, experiences and career paths, communication with school board members, leadership style and skills, experiences with job stress and job satisfaction in the role and longevity and its impact on student achievement.

Finally, the principal researcher determined that school superintendent

qualifications, leadership skills, longevity and student achievement were the most salient research variables with which to confront the problem. She reflected upon relationships between and among variables she found in the research and combinations thereof. Her primary reflective aims were fourfold: (a) to explore the problem; (b) to understand the relevance of the role of school superintendent; (c) to determine qualifications for school superintendent candidates, leadership skills in the role, longevity and its impact of student achievement; and (d) to understand perceptions about the problem and the related variables held by professional Florida K-12 public school educators.

### ***Background and Justification***

In the United States, the role of school superintendent grew increasingly complex over time (Bjork, Kowalski, & Brown-Ferrigno, 2014). Many men and women selected for the role of school superintendent in the United States did not enjoy success and longevity in the role (Hackett, 2015). As part of an ongoing accountability movement in United States' public system of education, school boards experienced pressure to hire the best educational leaders and to closely monitor school performance regularly (Tripses, Hunt, Kim, & Watkins, 2015).

School superintendents resigned prior to implementing necessary plans and achieving common goals, suffered from job stress and had low levels of job satisfaction. Under pressures from the federal and state governments, many school boards terminated school superintendents who failed to implement improvement reform plans and failed to achieve goals. Kamler (2009) observed, many school boards' elevated expectations resulted in heightened visibility, scrutiny, and vulnerability for newly selected school superintendents. Fullan (2000) suggested, elevated expectations contributed to increased

frequency of school superintendent turnover and long-term impact.

Frequent turnovers in the role of school superintendent, whereby multiple men and women relocated or left the field completely, derailed collaborative goals aimed at school improvement, decreased personnel support, impaired organizational culture and climate and decreased student achievement (Augustine-Shaw, 2013). Grissom and Mitani (2016) explained, low-performing school districts had higher rates of school superintendent turnover than higher performing school districts. Retaining qualified and experienced men and women in the role of school superintendent with longevity remained an all-important objective for school districts and stakeholders who actively sought improvement and stability. (Grissom & Mitani, 2016).

Communication between school superintendents and school board members was a pivotal factor involved in school superintendent longevity and student achievement. Grissom and Mitani (2016) emphasized, to obtain the objective of stability and improvement through school superintendent longevity, school board members and school superintendents maintained positive relations, as part of a joint-venture for success, rather than an adversarial battle for power. In school districts where school board members served staggered elected terms, choosing relevantly qualified candidates for school superintendent was as problematic as retaining selected candidates.

Relevantly qualified school superintendents with strong and germane leadership skills were valuable assets to school districts. Plotts and Gutmore (2014) concluded, active school superintendents with more career experience in a hiring state had more influence on student achievement than active school superintendents with less career experience in a hiring state. Plotts and Gutmore also highlighted, the more career

experience a school superintendent gained in a hiring state, the more effective he or she became in managing the increased pressures of accountability in that state. Hart, Schramm-Possinger and Hoyle (2019) affirmed, school superintendents with in-state career experience were more effective in influencing student achievement than those without it. In-state career experience, specifically with curriculum and testing, related to enhanced organizational stability and professional relationships resulting in effective leadership skills applications.

Debate existed about the right amount of time required for a school superintendent to implement, monitor and tweak educational initiatives, maximize school improvement efforts and enrich student achievement. Schibler (2006) suggested, 10 years was an ideal tenure and term within which school superintendents could achieve systemic and positive organizational growth and development and increased student achievement through stability and deeper relations. Other researchers concluded five years was a sufficient tenure or term of service within which to accomplish goals (Domenech, 2015). Chirichello (2018) suggested, 20 years was an ideal term for men and women to serve with distinction.

Although the position of school superintendent was important and became well paid, the role was not entirely glamorous. Domenech (2015) compared candidates for the role of school superintendent to highly educated migrant workers. According to Domenech, the average school superintendent tenure remained consistent at about three years because candidates moved repeatedly. Research about school superintendent longevity, service and tenure expectations assisted school boards and school districts in planning and budgeting for present and predicted needs. It also helped candidates



selected for the role of school superintendent to plan and budget for their own professional and personal needs.

### ***Deficiencies in the Evidence***

School districts in the United States had varied and diverse populations and needs. Some states had many and more numerous, smaller school districts than the 67 county school districts carved out in the state of Florida. The extent, if any, to which increased intrastate school district numerosity and size may have played in school superintendent longevity and turnover was an area for further examination beyond the scope of the study.

Socio-economics played a significant role in school superintendent turnover. Grissom and Andersen (2012) found a positive relationship between student poverty and school superintendent turnover. The largest 10% of districts in their sample had significantly higher school superintendent turnover than the remaining 90% (Grissom & Anderson, 2012). They classified larger school districts as urban and found them to be associated with student poverty and low student achievement.

Low performing school districts were anathema for men and women seeking the role of School Superintendent. Grissom and Mitani (2016) suggested, school superintendents desired longevity in high-performing school districts but did not desire it in low-performing school districts. In lower-performing school districts, school superintendents had the added responsibility of school district transformation and thus were at higher risk for career burnout. Shorter tenures were most common in the lower-performing school districts.

In low-performing school districts, more intense and sustained school

superintendent-driven strategic planning was required for improved student achievement. Low-performing school districts also required stronger school board supervision and monitoring of school superintendent goals, objectives and initiatives. The principal researcher determined, in-depth examination of socio-economic and performance diversity among school districts and respective needs-assessments were subjects for future research, beyond the scope of the study.

Variables not fully considered among the extant research literature nor examined herein also included in-depth examination of variance in qualifications, leadership skills, longevity and student achievement among specific school superintendents recruited from out of state, or out of district, as compared with those recruited internally. Fusarelli, Cooper, and Carella (2003) suggested, more research was required to identify “what can be done to attract more qualified men and women into the superintendency and push them up the career ladder to service in larger and more difficult systems” (p. 308). The principal researcher considered in depth exploration of in-state and in-district career experience as it correlated with leadership skills, longevity and student achievement as valuable areas for future research beyond the scope of the study.

More research was required into the nature of national preparation, licensing, and the effectiveness of professional development programs designed to improve school superintendent performance and longevity at the local level (Plotts & Gutmore, 2014). Henrikson (2018) explained, school board evaluation of men and women in the role of school superintendent had to balance the need for institutional accountability with the need for ongoing professional growth and support for men and women in the role. The principal researcher concluded that an examination of the extent to which school boards

and their standing committees, if any, were involved in school superintendent professional development was an appropriate area for further research, beyond the scope of the study.

### **Audience**

The audience for the study includes Florida's K-12 public school board members, school district personnel, including district and school leaders and teachers, students and parents. It also includes university and college administrators, faculty, and personnel, professional education consultants and other related educational services providers involved in supporting Florida's K-12 public school system, training Florida's K-12 professional educators and leaders and recruiting Florida's K-12 public school graduates for higher education studies and programs. Finally, community members and stakeholders are also included in the intended audience.

A major focal point of the study was student achievement, a variable statistically correlated with graduation rates, rates of homeownership, employment, crime and other variables of social and economic interests. As such, community members are further included in the audience. An Analysis of Florida Educators' Perceptions of the School Superintendency, Qualifications, Leadership Skills, Longevity and Its Impact on Student Achievement: A Quantitative Study, can empower stakeholders to make better informed decisions related to school district governance, human resource practices, professional training and development, best practices and systems of school improvement. It can also provide a valuable resource to communities involved in the cogitation of civic issues involving public-education and its' funding.

**Setting of the Study**

The setting of this study was Florida's K-12 public school districts. Charter schools did not fall squarely within public school district organizational charts for purposes of accountability nor for payroll purposes. Therefore, the principal researcher did not invite charter school educators to participate in the study but rather only invited professional K-12 professional educators employed by a Florida public school district to participate in the study. Charter school employees were not included in the sample.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was twofold: (a) to determine Florida educators' perceptions of the role of school superintendent, necessary qualifications of school superintendent candidates, important leadership skills, longevity and its impact on student achievement; and (b) to determine how Florida educators' current jobs affect their perceptions of the role of school superintendent, necessary qualifications of school superintendent candidates, important leadership skills, longevity and its impact on student achievement. The following five research questions guided the study: 1. What are Florida educators' perceptions of factors of the role of the school superintendent, necessary qualifications of candidates, important leadership skills, longevity and its impact on student achievement? 2. How does current job affect educators' perceptions of factors of the role of the school superintendent? 3. How does current job affect educators' perceptions of necessary qualifications for school superintendent candidates? 4. How does current job affect educators' perceptions of important school superintendent leadership skills related to longevity? 5. How does current job affect educators'

perceptions of the impact of the school superintendent's longevity on student achievement?

The principal researcher determined demographic variables among a sample of professional Florida K-12 public school educators employed within Florida's 67 school districts. Independent demographic variables among sample participants included: gender, current job, highest level of completed education and years of experience as an educator. Dependent variables included: qualifications, leadership skills, longevity, and student achievement.

### **Definitions of Terms**

#### ***Coach***

This term referred to individuals who helped others develop specific skills through personalized training (Berman & Brandt, 2006).

#### ***Communication***

This term referred to the rational transmission and receipt of messages involving skills in sharing and responding to emotions and negotiating shared interpretations and understandings (Hackman & Johnson, 2013).

#### ***Leadership***

This term referred to a process wherein individuals influenced others to accomplish a collaborative objective (Northouse, 2013). It also referred to communication that influenced opinions to achieve mutual goals (Hackman & Johnson, 2013).

#### ***Mentor***

This term referred to an individual who taught and nurtured others (Munoz,

Pankake, Ramaalho, Mills, & Simonsson, 2014).

***Organizational Culture and Climate***

This term referred to shared and learned beliefs used to solve problems and achieve shared goals. It also referred to shared meanings attached to events, policies, practices, procedures, and behaviors (Ehrhart & Schneider, 2016).

***Personnel support***

This term referred to employee approval of a given school superintendent and increased performance given by the employee based on the approval (Morris, Lummis, Lock, Ferguson, Hill, & Nykiel, 2020).

***Professional Associations, Accreditation Agencies, and Licensure Groups***

This term referred to entities that protected public interests and legitimized a professional social standing by the provision of quality controls (Kowalski & Bjork, 2005).

***Qualifications***

This term referred to the combination of education, experience, leadership skills and traits a selected candidate brought to the role of school superintendent (Mahitivanichcha & Rorrer, 2006).

***Satisfaction***

This term referred to feelings of enjoyment and gratification derived from performance in the role of school superintendent and was closely related to stress (Bell, 2019).

***School Improvement Reform***

This term referred to legislation and policy aimed at the development of more

effective School systems and at raising levels of student learning and achievement. (Hopkins & Levin, 2000).

***School Superintendent Longevity***

This term specifically referred to “the number of consecutive years worked in the same position in the same school district” and broadly referred to combined years of experience in multiple school superintendent roles, regardless of location. (Giaquinto, 2011, p. 11).

***Sponsor***

This term referred to an individual with the power to advance another’s career (Munoz et al., 2014).

***Stress***

This term referred to harmful physical and emotional manifestations in school superintendents that occurred when his or her qualifications, skills and needs did not match role requirements (Bell, 2019).

***Student Achievement***

This term referred to student academic performance in areas such as English and language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies, as measured by standardized assessments (Cunningham, 2012).

***Tenure***

This term referred to longevity and service in a given employment role (though in other contexts, it referred to the status of holding one’s position on a permanent basis (Giaquinto, 2011, p.11).

***Turnover***

This term referred to one or more individuals exiting an employing organization (Chaitra & Murthy, 2015).

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