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COLLECTIVE BARGAINING IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS:
SUPERINTENDENTS' PERSPECTIVE

by

Kyle W. Mayer

A Dissertation
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Educational Leadership, Research and Technology
Dr. Walter Burt, Advisor

Western Michigan University
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Kyle W. Mayer

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ii
LIST OF TABLES	vi
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY	1
Background for the Study	1
Statement of the Problem.....	7
Purpose of the Study	8
Research Questions	8
Research Design.....	9
Significance of the Study	10
Limitations of the Study.....	11
Organization of Remaining Chapters.....	11
II. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	13
Status of the Superintendency.....	13
Assessing the Superintendency.....	16
Politics and the Superintendency	18
Experience and Succession	20
Student Achievement Accountability and the Superintendency	22
The Challenges of No Child Left Behind	25

Table of Contents—Continued

CHAPTER

Achievement Accountability Implications for the Superintendent.....	27
Michigan School Funding.....	29
Teacher Unions and School Reform	30
Teacher Unions and Wages and Benefits.....	32
Collective Bargaining Implications for the Superintendent.....	33
III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	36
Research Design.....	37
Data Collection Methodology.....	39
Subjects, Sampling, and Access.....	41
Research Questions.....	42
Instrumentation	43
Data Analysis	43
The Researcher.....	45
Study Delimitations and Limitations	46
IV. FINDINGS.....	48
Participants.....	50
Participant Response Data	51
Research Question 1: How Are Selected Superintendents Experiencing the Collective Bargaining Process?	53
Research Subquestion 1a: How Are Selected Superintendents Dealing With Expenditure Increases Related to Employee Health Care and Retirement?	64

Table of Contents—Continued

CHAPTER

Research Subquestion 1b: How Are Selected Superintendents Dealing With Pressures to Increase Student Achievement at the Bargaining Table?	67
Research Question 2: What Type of Preparation and/or Experience Do Selected Superintendents Feel They Need in Order to Serve as the District Leader in the Collective Bargaining Process?	69
Summary of Findings.....	71
V. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	73
Summary of Findings.....	73
Conclusions.....	79
Recommendations for Future Research	81
REFERENCES	84
APPENDICES	
A. Human Subjects Institutional Review Board Letter of Approval	89
B. Dissertation HSIRB Application.....	91
C. Interview Outline for Personal Interviews	105
D. Interview Outline for Focus Groups	108
E. Initial Email Letter to Prospective Sample Superintendents.....	111
F. Formal Invitation to Participate	113
G. Consent Document.....	118
H. Interview Follow-Up Document	122

LIST OF TABLES

1. Emergent Themes and Subthemes by Superintendents' Level of Experience	52
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

This is a phenomenological study examining the lived experiences of practicing public school superintendents of rural and suburban school districts in Michigan with respect to collective bargaining with teacher union groups. Focus group and individual interviews were utilized in order to identify relevant thematic responses involving challenges that modern rural and suburban superintendents face within the collective bargaining process. Furthermore, this qualitative study examined the range of bargaining strategies utilized by the sample superintendents in order to advance additional leadership responsibilities including student achievement as well as district financial concerns.

Background for the Study

The role of school superintendent in modern America is an increasingly difficult task. Superintendents of public schools are currently challenged by inadequate financing, student achievement reform, strained superintendent-board of education relations, school violence, and increasing pressures from interest groups (Norton, Webb, Dlugosh, & Sybouts, 1996). Each of these factors falls squarely within the realm of responsibilities commonly assumed by public school superintendents.

At no time in our nation's history has the role of superintendent had the magnitude of responsibility that it does today. One of the greatest challenges

superintendents of public schools are facing is the ever-increasing accountability standards in relation to student achievement (Porter, Linn, & Trimble, 2005). The No Child Left Behind Legislation (commonly referred to as NCLB) has mandated that all students in the United States will progress toward proficiency in core content areas. School systems whose students fail to make achievement goals as mandated by NCLB over a prescribed period of academic years are, subsequently, penalized in the form of re-staffing, loss of local control, and denial of funding (Porter et al., 2005).

Additionally, public school superintendents are experiencing a great deal of public scrutiny and pressure regarding student achievement (Cochran-Smith, 2005). Standardized test results are now a matter discussed widely in the broader population. Emphasis on college preparedness is at an all time high. The demand for real estate in various neighborhoods is known to rise and fall depending on the proficiency level of local students as depicted by published state and national student achievement assessments. Parents are demanding the broadest of educational opportunities for their children in preparing them for the global workplace. Wide varieties of course options and extra-curricular opportunities are also demanded by parents who want the finest preparation for their children. The advantage of attendance at the local school in the town of residence is increasingly competing with the advantages of school choice (Cochran-Smith, 2005). As a result, school districts are spending more resources in advertisement and marketing their educational and extra-curricular programming. Families and students are encouraged via radio, television, and print advertisement to enroll in the schools offering superior programming. School enrollment and recruitment of students are rapidly

progressing toward a business model in its method to attract customers (Cochran-Smith, 2005).

In Michigan, EducationYES! is the state accountability format intended to foster school improvement while implementing the measures mandated by NCLB. Michigan schools are evaluated annually using student achievement scores as well other measures to report their status through the use of a self-assessment. These quality indicators range in content from curriculum alignment to physical maintenance characteristics of the school facilities. As mandated by EducationYES!, a report card is issued to every school building in the state of Michigan based upon a formula that includes student achievement data and self-assessment indicators. Each report card issues particular schools a letter grade ranging from A to F, and carries with it a significant meaning to the community regarding the performance of a school building or district. In each successive year since the implementation of EducationYES!, an increasing number of schools have been labeled as failing (Cochran-Smith, 2005). It is to be expected that this trend of schools being labeled as failing will continue unabatedly into the future as the requirements of NCLB become increasingly more rigorous.

It can be argued that the increased federal and state accountability measures have not been met with a commensurate increase in funding. As Hoyle, Bjork, Collier, and Glass (2004) state:

It is evident that the federal government is handing states the largest unfunded education mandate in American history at a time when states are faced with a moribund economy, increasing budget deficits, and state legislatures that chant the mantra of "no new taxes." (p. 2)

Consequently, one of the primary challenges facing Michigan public school institutions today is the cost of doing business.

At an increasing rate, schools across Michigan are depleting their cash reserves, which are reserved for payroll and other unforeseen expenses (Courant & Loeb, 1997). Frequently, schools in Michigan are outspending their revenues. At the same time, due to the economic climate in the state of Michigan, state revenues (which comprise the bulk of public school funding) are stagnating. Consequently, many Michigan public school districts are on the verge of financial bankruptcy (Courant & Loeb, 1997).

Michigan legislators initiate a school fund budget each year based on tax revenue projections. On multiple occasions over the past decade, tax revenues have been less than expected within the state resulting in mid-year cuts or prorations that have impacted all local school districts. In effect, districts learn that projected revenues, used to generate and adopt annual school budgets, may or may not be received in full. This situation is exacerbated by the increasingly late verification of revenue shortfalls—too late in the school year to make significant structural changes in major cost areas such as staffing and benefits. This places superintendents in the precarious position of making drastic mid-year budget cuts, which may include strategies such as personnel layoffs, absorption of the shortfall from fund equity balances, or shifting the impact of the shortfall into the next fiscal and academic year (Courant & Loeb, 1997). This type of shift compounds the budget balancing act, since it is usually coupled with no or inadequate funding increases to offset the previous year's losses. As this trend persists, school districts undergo increasingly drastic budget cuts that undermine their ability to deliver quality programs and all of the services their communities expect from their public schools.

While school revenues have not risen significantly in recent years, the cost of operating a school district has been on a steady incline. One of the primary reasons that school operational costs are rising faster than the general cost of living is the increasing cost of benefits such as health care and retirement for employees. Typically, a school spends 80% or more of its budget on personnel related items. In recent years, retirement and health care costs of public school educators have risen dramatically (Guthrie, 1997). Superintendents and business managers regularly project double-digit increases in the cost of health care policies for professional staff. The guaranteed retirement system enjoyed by state employees in Michigan is also a source of political debate. The auto industry, long Michigan's most successful business sector, has recently struggled to compete globally and has consistently lost market share. Along with the auto industry, an overall stagnant economy in Michigan, has led to a multitude of privately owned businesses to eliminate guaranteed retirement plans for employees. As Michigan's economy continues to struggle, the long-enjoyed benefits of state educators become increasing targets of public debate.

At the collective bargaining table, the cost of benefits is an increasingly tenuous issue. School personnel, such as teachers and support staffs, have long enjoyed comprehensive health and retirement packages. Often, Michigan educators have utilized MESSA health insurance, a third-party provider for Blue Cross and Blue Shield, which primarily serve Michigan Education Association members. At an escalating rate, school administrators are arguing that MESSA insurance is expensive and difficult for school districts to continue to provide this benefit. School districts are attempting to negotiate alternatives to MESSA health care, such as health savings accounts (HSA) and health

retirement accounts (HRA). HSAs and HRAs allow insured staff an annual deductible allowance, which is higher than the typical deductible held with MESSA insurance. This higher deductible allows school districts to control the cost of insurance premiums. When the deductible is not exceeded, the staff member recovers the unused dollars as a personal gain. In this way, employees are encouraged to become better consumers in seeking treatments and medications. In concept, costs are controlled through increased consumer awareness and vigilance in seeking cost effective health care.

The combination of increased student accountability and scarce financial resources place superintendents in a precarious situation. Striking a balance between the responsibility of being the instructional leader of a school district, while at the same time serving as caretaker of the school district's operational budget, is becoming increasingly complex and extremely difficult to manage. Boards of Education have little tolerance for the lack of student achievement and even less tolerance for poor fiscal management.

At the bargaining table, the multiple responsibilities of a school superintendent are on full display. The superintendent clearly wants the instructional staff to understand that they are appreciated and valued. An effective superintendent is also deeply concerned about student achievement and keeps this objective in the fore during the bargaining process. At the same time, the superintendent must be vigilant in conserving taxpayer dollars as they are utilized within the school system.

Faced with numerous challenges, some of which are conflicting in nature, superintendents employ a multitude of strategies in relation to collective bargaining. Various superintendents may seek to remove themselves from the process to the greatest degree possible. Removal from the process is believed by some to be necessary in order

to maintain the positive working-relationship necessary to foster curricular and instructional change. Still other superintendents may serve in their district as the lead negotiator (Brown & McLaughlin, 1990). Regardless of the approach used, superintendents are ultimately responsible for the success or failure of a ratified contract. Much could be gained through the sharing of ideas, strategies, successes, and failures that are acquired by superintendents as they experience the collective bargaining process.

Statement of the Problem

This phenomenological inquiry focuses on the need of school superintendents to succeed in the collective bargaining process. Success, as it relates to collective bargaining, may be impossible to define as it will be different for every school district. However defined, success in collective bargaining must encompass a signed agreement, which indicates satisfactory compensation to district employees while allowing a district to remain academically fit as well as financially solvent.

The researcher for this study is a first-year superintendent in Michigan and, while conducting the study, is simultaneously engaged in the collective bargaining process. Therefore, the researcher is intrinsically interested in gaining knowledge about the collective bargaining process. The motivation for this study is to explore the lived experiences of modern-day superintendents within the collective bargaining process. The focus is on superintendents' recollections and experiences within the collective bargaining process. This approach facilitates the researcher in uncovering and exploring the challenges presented by collective bargaining among superintendents and the various strategies that they employ throughout the process.

Given the environment of multiple (and often competing) interests that modern superintendents work in; there is a need for better information for effective management of the collective bargaining process. Rural and suburban superintendents often shoulder a myriad of responsibilities within their districts, including budget management as well as primary instructional leadership. What requires further research is a detailed analysis regarding how these multiple roles manifest at the collective bargaining table, and to examine the effectiveness of various bargaining strategies employed by modern superintendents.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study is to explore how selected rural and suburban Michigan school district superintendents are experiencing the collective bargaining process. Exploration included an examination of the various roles that selected superintendents have played in the collective bargaining process.

Furthermore, exploration included emergent themes that frame areas of greatest challenges facing superintendents in recent collective bargaining negotiations. Among the emergent themes, particular attention was given to the rising cost of health care benefits.

Finally, this study synthesizes and develops, through analysis of responses given by the sample group of superintendents, emerging themes that indicate the range of strategies employed by superintendents within the collective bargaining process.

Research Questions

This study seeks to provide answers to the following questions:

Question 1: How are selected superintendents experiencing the collective bargaining process?

Subquestion 1a: How are selected superintendents dealing with expenditure increases related to employee health care and retirement?

Subquestion 1b: How are selected superintendents dealing with pressures to increase student achievement at the bargaining table?

Question 2: What type of preparation and/or experiences do selected superintendents feel they need to possess in order to serve as the district leader in the collective bargaining process?

Research Design

This is a phenomenological study which is designed to investigate the experiences of 10 Michigan superintendents within the confines of the collective bargaining process. The researcher utilized a qualitative approach to examine the experiences of 10 superintendents who play various roles and have various experiences within the collective bargaining process. The researcher applied qualitative analyses of the experiences shared by the various superintendents to develop emerging themes that indicate a range of strategies employed by superintendents as they engage in the collective bargaining process, as well as carrying out those responsibilities needed to negotiate a successor agreement in their respective school districts.

Ten practicing school superintendents were selected to participate in this study. The subjects chosen for this study are a purposive sample of 10 Midwestern school superintendents in relatively small rural and suburban school districts. These 10

superintendents currently oversee school districts that range in size from approximately 800 students to over 5,000 students.

Data were collected through the utilization of in-depth personal interviews as well as focus group interviews. Detailed information regarding the subjects, sampling, and data analysis procedures for this study is discussed in Chapter III.

Significance of the Study

Due to a focus on present-day school budget and accountability issues, this study will add to the existing literature about the role of superintendents as they engage in the negotiations process. The intent of this study is to learn more about the challenges facing superintendents in the current era of collective bargaining. In addition, this study will provide understanding regarding emerging themes pertaining to strategies that superintendents employ in reaching an agreement that is satisfactory to staff as well as the district. Furthermore, in examining several superintendents with relatively little experience in collective bargaining, this study sheds light on how prepared, or unprepared, some superintendents may be in managing this process. Valuable insight was gathered that may present further implications related to college preparation programs or professional development opportunities for superintendents.

In short, the study of the lived experiences among a group of superintendents with a range of roles and responsibilities related to collective bargaining may produce important themes that can provide guidance for other superintendents facing the same challenges. The information attained through this study, which adds to the body of

knowledge regarding current affairs and strategies within the public school bargaining arena, certainly satisfies the principle of importance requisite of qualitative research.

Limitations of the Study

The primary focus of this study was to determine how 26 mid-Michigan superintendents are experiencing the collective bargaining process given current concerns about student achievement, fiscal accountability, and dwindling public school resources. The scope of this study was limited to a sample of 10 mid-Michigan superintendents with varying degrees of experience within the collective bargaining process. Therefore, the findings of this study are only trustworthy to superintendents in districts that participated in the study and do not include superintendents who did not participate. Finally, of necessity, this study assumes that the responses given by superintendents are accurate and represent a valid representation of superintendents' perceptions.

Organization of Remaining Chapters

The remaining portion of the dissertation is organized into four separate chapters. Chapter II is a review of the research literature pertaining to superintendents and the roles they play within the collective bargaining process. The literature review also develops major facets of the modern superintendency that play a role at the collective bargaining table. These facets include changes in student achievement pressures under No Child Left Behind, school funding issues (particularly in Michigan), health care cost increases, and retirement system woes. Chapter II ends with a synthesis of these various factors that influence a superintendent within the collective bargaining process.

Chapter III presents the methodology for the study as well as a rationale for the chosen method. The procedures used as well as the analysis approach of this study are also contained in Chapter III. Chapter IV describes and analyzes the data collected. Chapter V provides answers to the major purposes of this study by combining the findings in this study along with the relevant review of the literature into summative statements and conclusions of this study. And finally, of necessity, this study provides recommendations to guide further investigations into this challenging area.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In crafting this literature review, the goal of the researcher was to create a frame of reference for understanding the role of the superintendent as it relates to the collective bargaining process. In order to achieve this goal, this literature review has been organized in a manner that begins with a broad overview of the profession. As the literature review unfolds, specific challenges faced by modern superintendents, including student achievement pressures, political interests, and budgetary concerns, are developed and discussed. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion regarding how all of the previously discussed challenges manifest within the arena of collective bargaining.

This literature review, while relatively brief, focuses on the broader issues surrounding the role of superintendents and their relationship to the collective bargaining process. Only the most relevant sources were utilized within this literature review, and the researcher found that there is not a great deal of current research available specifically associated with the superintendents role within the collective bargaining process, which lends further credence to this study.

Status of the Superintendency

The profession of public school superintendent is arguably one of the most challenging professions in the modern workplace. Certainly, the challenges that current

superintendents face in their oversight of public school districts is fraught with pressures that are increasing from all sides. As of 2005, over 53 million students attended public school in the United States, more than at any other time in our nation's history. At the same time, a teacher shortage of over 2 million teachers is projected prior to 2015. Furthermore, an estimated \$112 billion is needed to adequately update, repair, and replace inadequate school facilities across the country (Hunter & Donahoo, 2005).

Regardless of the challenges, superintendents are expected by Boards of Education and the general communities for which they work to be highly competent in guiding the school district through the perils of the educational environment.

These groups hope the acquisition of a new leader also will lead to increased funding and resources (preferably from state or federal sources), improvement in teacher quality, better academic performance, and greater influence over how their local school district operates. Much like a superhero, these stakeholders expect the superintendent to solve these problems cheaply, instantly, and without assistance from others. In doing so, they deny the impact of state and district policies and politics on the superintendent's ability to change anything. (Hunter & Donahoo, 2005, p. 426)

The expectation that a superintendent can make a positive impact in the face of rising challenges is supported by a great deal of research. In a landmark study by Meier and O'Toole (2002), the effect of managerial quality on school program performance was studied utilizing results from over 1,000 school districts in Texas. The findings of this study, which have been widely supported thereafter, display compelling evidence that the quality of superintendent management has a tangible effect on program performance in areas ranging from school budget to student academic achievement. Factors such as student pass rates and dropout rates were affected positively by highly skilled superintendents and in reverse for superintendents considered to be less adept at the

profession. The study further expounds that when combined with the managerial quality of second and third tier administrators such as central office personnel and school principals, the overall impact of leadership upon overall school performance is highly significant.

While research has shown that high quality school leadership is important, an additional challenge of the profession is that quality leadership is not often recognized, nor appreciated. Certainly all superintendents are evaluated and critiqued by a Board of Education who may or may not be well equipped to do so. As one Ohio superintendent stated in a study conducted by Nestor-Baker and Hoy (2001):

All your career you're working for one person who has been trained in what you do, probably had the job you had. Teacher, principal, whatever. And then you're superintendent. Now you're working for five people, who, if you're lucky, usually think 3-2. If you're lucky. And . . . they've never had your job. They have no clue what you do for a living, they have no idea what things are coming at you and so on. . . . And the challenge is realizing and respecting that the board ultimately does answer to the electorate for the things you're about to do. (p. 101)

In addition to the frustration of job performance evaluation by citizens who may be untrained in the field, the superintendency is often described by those within the field as a lonely job (Nestor-Baker & Hoy, 2001). Superintendents often struggle with the inability to develop meaningful relationships within the workplace. A necessary distance is often described due to the supervisory role of the superintendent as well as the influence that the superintendent has regarding staff compensation and benefits. The Nestor-Baker and Hoy (2001) study found that reputationally successful superintendents tend to worry less about pleasing others, less about the friendship, and less about minutiae, and tend to utilize their authority to focus on big-picture operations.

In order to meet the challenges of the modern education environment, while at the same time working in concert with staff members and community, a necessity of the superintendent is high-level personal communication skills (Kowalski, 2005). One of the primary roles of the superintendent is that of the lead educator within the district. He or she is the teacher of the teachers and the administrator of the administrators. The superintendent also plays the role of the district ambassador and statesman at the local and state levels. Personal communication skills within these roles are essential. As Tony Bush (2003) argues, in these current times of external influences it is tempting for school leaders to consider avoidance of their high-level communication responsibilities and to slip into the roles of managers, managing the goals given by others. Successful leaders must develop their own internal organizational aims. "If managers simply focus on implementing external initiatives, they risk becoming 'managerialists.' Successful management requires a clear link between aims, strategy and operational management" (p. 2).

Accessing the Superintendency

The process of superintendent selection sheds a great deal of light on the current status of the profession. Most often, the same people who evaluate the superintendent's performance (commonly not educational professionals) are the gatekeepers to the superintendency (Tallerico, 2000.) Typically, gatekeepers to the superintendency consciously and subconsciously seek candidates who have worked in specific capacities in their prior professional experience. Often, superintendents have experience in building principalships and other central office positions.

However, access to the superintendency is not always a fair contest based on credentials and experience (Tallerico, 2000.) Frequently, board members and selection committees on a conscious and subconscious level are looking for a stereotypic leader with whom they feel comfortable. In general, male Caucasians who have children and express a willingness to live within the school district have fit the expected profile. The practice of public school board members hypervaluing their level of personal comfort with the candidate tends to disadvantage minority as well as women applicants at the local district level (Tallerico, 2000). In fact 16% of college CEOs in the U.S. are women, but less than 5% are in public education (Alston, 2000). Additionally, gender differences are present also not only within job placement, but within job benefits (Meier & Wilkins, 2002). Although over 40 years have passed since the passage of the Equal Pay Act of 1963, female superintendents tend to earn less compensation than do their male counterparts.

Of further interest within the hiring process for superintendents is the relatively recent trend toward hiring “gunslinger” superintendents, or those who have a business world background and little or no educational experience (Eisinger & Hula, 2004). The idea that schools should be operated similar to a traditional business model has gained strength in recent years as a result of increased output expectations and budget management crises. School boards are increasingly finding successful business world leaders attractive “for their assumed independence, management expertise, and decision-making abilities, judging these attributes more important than professional training and experience in public education” (Eisinger & Hula, 2004, p. 623).

Politics and the Superintendency

To be certain, the process of hiring a superintendent involves a great deal of politics, with various groups seeking to serve particular interests. However, when asked directly, U.S. citizens generally report a dislike for politics within the public schools and indicate a desire to have it minimized (Bjork & Lindle, 2001).

Nevertheless, politics and the role of the superintendent are inextricably linked. The position of superintendent was in fact created in the late 19th century in order to embody some of the political issues that schools face. In fact, change is often fostered within school through a traditionally political model known as Dissatisfaction Theory. Dissatisfaction Theory proposes that the traditional trend for inspiring change with a school system is for community dissatisfaction about an issue to fester until it reaches a critical mass. When mobilized, this critical mass elects board members who share the cause. Eventually the superintendent will join in the cause or be replaced by those in the dissatisfied minority (Alsbury, 2003).

The democratic basis of U.S. public education ensures that politics will always be present within public school systems. The basic fact that Boards of Education are elected popularly dictates a political influence within school systems. "Today's school superintendents work in environments of participatory decision making, shared governance, and highly dynamic political interests" (Bjork & Lindle, 2001, p. 79).

While superintendents work within a highly political environment, individual superintendents choose to embrace the political aspect of the profession to various

degrees. Findings suggest that many superintendents refuse to make decisions for political reasons, viewing personal judgment as superior to outside pressures.

Another possibility for not making decisions based on purely political systems is that superintendent training programs are teaching new superintendents to be courageous, moral guardians of what is best for students. Tony Bush (2003) challenges school leaders to lift those with which they work, “to their better selves” (p. 462). Authors such as James MacGregor Burns (1978) engrain into aspiring superintendents the idea of moral and reform leadership. However, Burns himself cautions educational leaders to be mindful of the political environment in which they operate:

Far-reaching change in the end is carried through less by reform leaders, vital though their role is, than by politicians who see their political ambitions entangled in the reform effort. In other words, successful leaders understand the political side of the profession and are able to work both within and outside of it. (p. 200)

The modern superintendent role also necessitates an understanding of the surrounding political atmosphere in order to work successfully with the Board of Education. “In fact, the relationship between school board members and superintendents is often characterized as controversial, arduous, and challenging, yet it has been difficult for researchers to agree on the causes of such difficulties” (Mountford, 2004, p. 705).

The board, which ultimately hires and evaluates the performance of the superintendent, is comprised of members who may have sought election for highly isolated or political reasons. Particular members may have sought a role on the board due to a desire to gain power over others in seeking to achieve a particular personal agenda.

In this highly political and often divisive environment, the superintendent relationship with the president of the board of education is a key indicator of the level of

success that may be achievable. A superintendent's credibility, social attractiveness, assertiveness, and emotiveness are the key factors that board presidents report as indicators of success (Petersen & Short, 2001).

The level of trust that a superintendent enjoys in relation to the Board of Education can be demonstrated in the level of leadership that the superintendent is able to exert. Typically, the board will let the superintendent operate freely to the extent that the board has faith in the competency and honesty of the superintendent. Trusted superintendents are expected to complete tasks such as setting the agenda for board meetings as well as basic management of educational and business decisions. On the other hand,

If the board president and superintendent have conflict, poor trust, poor communication, then that is going to be seen at the board meetings and how the board as a whole relates to the superintendent. If you don't have a good relationship with the superintendent, teachers feel a lack of security; central office feels a lack of security; and all that will carry over to the community. (Petersen & Short, 2001, p. 558)

Experience and Succession

With the frequent turnover of superintendents in modern public schools, the impact of newly hired superintendents has been the focus of several studies. Research has shown that a newly hired superintendent may not have the initial impact upon the performance of a school district as may have been anticipated (Juenke, 2005). In common circumstances, a newly appointed superintendent is either taking over for a successful superintendent who has retired or advanced, or the new superintendent is replacing someone whose performance led to dismissal. In either case, the momentum created by

the predecessor is likely to carry the district for some time while the new appointment orients to the position and is able to institute his or her leadership style. Candidates who were selected from the internal ranks of the school district may experience less of a delay in realizing the ability to foster change within the school district. However, managerial change on a regular basis is not a healthy situation for school districts (Hill, 2005.) In fact, the impact of a new superintendent upon a district may not be noticeable until up to 7 years of successful tenure (Hill, 2005; Juenke, 2005). Superintendents who have been in control of their organization for longer periods of time generally gain more positive outcomes. One reason for this increased effectiveness is that long-term superintendents understand how to better utilize the networks of individuals around them. These experienced superintendents have more leverage and know how to better utilize their positional power. Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal (2003) as well as Tony Bush (2003) also contend that superintendents increase their influence when they have a thorough understanding of the district in which they work. Organizations are complex, full of surprises, deception, and ambiguity. Bolman and Deal have been highly influential in superintendent training programs and foster a method of understanding organizations through multiple frames or perspectives. An exemplary leader recognizes the structural, human resources, political and symbolic natures of the organization and can apply the correct lens at the correct time in order to diagnose and prescribe proper leadership treatments at the proper time.

The current status of the superintendent profession is that it is experiencing a period of tremendous challenge and change. Projections for the future include increasing the standards for both superintendent placement and performance. Superintendents can

likely expect a more formalized form of evaluation in the future. In 1999, The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) contracted to develop an assessment tool that could be used across the country to evaluate and license public school superintendents (Holloway, 2001). The degree to which states are adopting these standards varies.

Student Achievement Accountability and the Superintendency

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 has had a profound effect on the way school superintendents manage and operate school districts across America. President George W. Bush authorized this accountability legislation as a method to address achievement gaps between minority and disadvantaged students and their classmates. At the time of No Child Left Behind inception, President Bush cited statistics that demonstrated that 70% of inner city 4th grade students were unable to read at a proficient level (Reschovsky & Imazeki 2003).

Therefore, No Child Left Behind was implemented with the intention of improving student achievement while reducing the achievement gap between all subpopulations of school children across America. In order to monitor the closing of the achievement gap, the federal government mandated that all states administer a battery of standardized tests to students in grades 3-8. In this manner, states would be accountable for reporting their progress toward closing the achievement gap between subgroups of students over the course of future years. The overarching goal, as outlined by President Bush, was that all students would be proficient in reading and mathematics by the year 2013.

The bold initiatives of No Child Left Behind represented a continuing escalation of federal policy implementation in public schools. Influence from Washington D.C. at the local school level had been gaining in momentum dating from the Russian Sputnik satellite launch of 1957 (Superfine, 2005).

The implementation of No Child Left Behind marked the beginning of a new era of the federal role in public education. However, the concept of rising educational standards and increased governmental pressure was not unknown to school leaders. Beginning with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, schools and communities have continually experienced political pressures to raise student achievement standards in America (McDonnell, 2005).

No Child Left Behind was not unique in its attempt to subvert local public schools to federal pressures. In addition, No Child Left Behind was not original in its idea that state-mandated testing was an important component of measuring student achievement growth. In fact, prior to the implementation of No Child Left Behind, 48 states had already implemented statewide assessment programs. The other two, Iowa and Nebraska, also already had state-mandated testing, but left the decision of which test to use to the local Boards of Education (Goertz & Duffy, 2003).

The uniqueness of No Child Left Behind is found in the degree to which the federal government exerted influence and control within public schools. "The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law of 2002 represents the most significant overhaul and expansion of the federal role in education since the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965" (McGuinn, 2005, p. 41). One example of the escalation of expectations deriving from the federal government is the mandate of adequate yearly progress under No Child

Left Behind. Adequate yearly progress mandates that all schools, as well as each student subgroup, make progress each year toward the objective of 100% proficiency by 2013 (Cochran-Smith, 2005).

Furthermore, No Child Left Behind represents an increased involvement of the federal government in public education in that strict sanctions are applied to districts failing to meet the mandate of adequate yearly progress. Public school districts failing to produce the requisite improvements in standardized test scores receive penalties based on the number of years that adequate yearly progress has not been achieved. An incremental system of penalties prescribed by No Child Left Behind begins with school districts addressing school improvement plans and offering free tutoring to students, and ends with a mandated government restructuring of the school district and replacing the personnel that it employs (Porter et al., 2005).

No Child Left Behind also exceeds prior federal education mandates in that it requires specific credentials for teachers. The concept of placing a highly qualified teacher in every classroom has been one of the most challenging obstacles for school administrators to meet (Cochran-Smith, 2005). Highly qualified, as defined by No Child Left Behind, requires that all teachers have a minimum of a bachelor's degree, full state certification or a passing score on state licensure exams, and demonstrated competence in the specific subject area that they teach. Therefore, No Child Left Behind extends federal control further into the classroom by mandating the content knowledge and certification levels of public school classroom teachers.

The Challenges of No Child Left Behind

In each successive year since the passage of No Child Left Behind, the number of schools identified as not making adequate yearly progress has increased (Cochran-Smith, 2005). After only the first 3 years of No Child Left Behind implementation, only five states were statistically considered to be on pace toward meeting the objective of 100% proficiency by 2013. Furthermore, minority students are statistically farther behind their classmates than they were prior to the enactment of No Child Left Behind and the gap continues to grow (Harris & Herrington, 2006).

Therefore, many educators and noneducators alike have begun to express concern over both the reasonableness of No Child Left Behind objectives as well as the motivations behind them. No Child Left Behind has been described by detractors as a politically motivated agenda, sponsored by proponents of private school vouchers, seeking to set unrealistic objectives and thereby guarantee failure of the U.S. public school system. No Child Left Behind has been described as “a highly coercive accountability system, based on competitive pressure and including public shaming and punishments for failure” (Cochran-Smith, 2005, p. 102).

Teachers unions in America have been in opposition to a number of the initiatives mandated by No Child Left Behind (Koppich, 2005). Arguments from teacher groups have included that the rigid curricular requirements and emphasis on mandated testing have worked to reduce teacher freedoms and creativity. Teachers groups have also questioned the fairness of the mandate that all students, including 6.6 million students in America who have been identified as eligible for special education, must be subjected to

state-mandated testing. However, many special needs students had been exempted from standardized testing in situations where their disability was determined to render the testing situation to be either unfair or not useful to the student's educational process (Simpson, LaCava, & Graner, 2004).

Further complaints levied against the No Child Left Behind law include the subjectivity of student proficiency determinations. Under No Child Left Behind, each state is assigned to develop its own method of testing and scoring for the purpose of determining proficiency. Many states, in order to avoid the sanctions set forth in the legislation, are lowering their testing standards to those set prior to the enactment of No Child Left Behind (Fusarelli, 2004). States who have retained highly rigorous curricular and testing standards have experienced a greater percentage of failing schools as defined by No Child Left Behind. In Florida, for example, 2005 test results showed that 90% of the state's schools failed to improve scores at a rate necessary to satisfy the requirements of adequate yearly progress (Goertz, 2005). Meanwhile other states with less rigorous standards have reported student test results demonstrating nearly 100% proficiency.

Furthermore, school districts who were struggling with student achievement prior to the implementation of No Child Left Behind, in general, have continued to struggle since its passage (Reschovsky & Imazeki, 2003). Arguments have arisen that the desired goal of reducing the achievement gap between subgroups of students will not occur until more basic level systematic changes are implemented (Ryan, 2002).

For example, a school district with a high concentration of students from poor families or from families where English is not spoken in the home may have to use additional resources (in the form of smaller classes or specialized programs) to reach specified achievement goals. Also, some districts, given their location and the composition of their student bodies, will have to pay higher salaries than

other districts to attract high-quality teachers. (Reschovsky & Imazeki, 2003, p. 265)

An additional fact confronted by many superintendents and other school leaders in light of all of the challenges presented by No Child Left Behind is that most districts typically receive less than 10% of their revenues from the federal government (DeBray, McDermott, & Wohlstetter, 2005). Traditionally, in public schools, accountability mandates follow the revenue stream. Furthermore, school administrators have routinely argued that the increasing accountability measures mandated by No Child Left Behind have not been matched by increasing support in the form of revenues (Imazeki & Reschovsky, 2004).

According to a study by Fusarelli (2004):

Seven independent state studies suggest an increase in total education spending ascribable to NCLB administrative costs between 2% and 2.5%, or \$11.3 billion new dollars (at 2.25%). This is compared to the total increase in Title I monies of \$4.6 billion. (p. 113)

Therefore, school officials have regularly contended that the increased accountability derived from federal policy is not being matched by any significant increase in resources.

Achievement Accountability Implications for the Superintendent

A 2005 general public opinion survey showed that 39% of the general public is favorable regarding No Child Left Behind, 38% are not favorable, and 23% are undecided (DeBray et al., 2005). This indecisiveness about the law in general is not reflected when specifics of the mandate are discussed within the same group. A 2006 survey found that while the general public does support the concept of school accountability, they do not support the concept of penalizing or sanctioning struggling schools (Hess, 2006).

Although certain portions of No Child Left Behind may vary in their popularity, observers of education politics are not expecting the concept of the federal role in education to decrease in the near future. The 2004 presidential election may have shed light on the future of No Child Left Behind:

The major story of the 2004 presidential election was that education was not a major story. In fact, however, the major story was that in the first presidential election following the passage of the most transformative national education law in forty years, there were remarkable few differences between the parties and candidates on NCLB and the federal role in schools. (McGuinn, 2005, p. 64)

Educational and political observers have noted that many of the components of No Child Left Behind have been hailed as great accomplishments from both Democrats and Republicans. The implication of this overall lack of distaste for No Child Left Behind initiatives is that there is no great political support for dismantling of the increased accountability pressures that have been placed upon public schools (Nash, 2002).

While the foreseeable future appears to include No Child Left Behind, not enough scholarly research has taken place in order to accurately measure the impact of this legislation (Hess, 2005). Debates continue about how to accurately and fairly measure adequate progress in student achievement. Furthermore, concern continues regarding the methods prescribed by No Child Left Behind. Specifically, arguments persist that the goals of adequate yearly progress are not supported by any real vehicle for systemic change at the classroom level (Marshak, 2003). The concern also persists that as the mandated proficiency levels increase, states will continue to soften the rigor of the curriculum as well as their standardized tests. This continual watering-down of the standards, some argue, will render the term *proficient* meaningless.

Meanwhile, some superintendents are much more favorable regarding the impact of No Child Left Behind (Cohn, 2005). Superintendents have argued that the mandates of No Child Left Behind have given school administrators greater leverage in inspiring change in classroom instructional practices. Further, superintendents have argued that student curricular requirements under No Child Left Behind have resulted in students attending to more rigorous college preparatory coursework.

Rod Paige, while serving as U.S. Secretary of Education, stated:

I'm not so naïve that I don't understand that superintendents are under a lot of pressure and that times are tough. But I believe superintendents are also tough. I believe that superintendents are the best agents for change and have a great opportunity at hand. They need to step up and take action. (Scherer, 2004, p. 23)

Michigan School Funding

Public school funding in Michigan underwent significant change as a result of the passage of Proposal A in 1993. Proposal A initiated a shift of school revenue sources from primarily local property taxes to that of state revenue sources (Courant & Loeb, 1997). The Proposal A funding formula was designed to bring greater equity to rural districts whose local property tax revenues were considered insufficient in comparison to urban or wealthy suburban school districts.

The immediate public response to the passage of Proposal A was mixed. Michigan's rural school districts enjoyed a significant revenue boost, while urban districts such as Detroit suffered a reduction in total revenues. Wealthy suburban school districts also noticed that an increased percentage of their local tax dollars were redistributed across the state in order to support school districts with smaller tax bases. However, many

of Michigan's wealthy suburban districts were able to circumvent the intent of equity through the successful passage of debt bonds among their communities. Michigan's wealthiest districts continued to enjoy greater funding levels than the majority of other Michigan school districts due to the increased willingness of their constituent community members to incur additional local taxes in exchange for state-of-the-art school buildings and curricular offerings (Zimmer & Jones, 2005). A 1995 study by Duplantis, Chandler, and Geske predicts the likelihood of wealthier communities supporting increased funding for their public schools:

A community's "taste" for governmental services and its ability to pay can be represented by per capita income of local residents, the median value of housing within the municipality, the percentage of the municipal population which has graduated from college, and school district enrollment. (p. 173)

Proposal A has also placed Michigan public schools in a position of reliance on the well-being of the Michigan state economy. Since the passage of Proposal A, school revenues in Michigan are generated primarily through state sales tax. Courant and Loeb (1997) advise that under Proposal A, school funding will be jeopardized whenever state revenues are lower than expected:

With school spending determined largely by state-level revenue sources, the next recession is likely to make the trade-off between school spending and the rest of the state budget much more salient than was ever the case when the local property tax was the principal source of school finance. (p. 133)

Teacher Unions and School Reform

Teacher unions in general have become more active in school operations dating back to 1960. Presently, nearly all public school systems recognize some sort of organized teacher labor group (Hoxby, 1996).

Many educational observers have argued that “collective bargaining and teacher unions have had a negative effect on the ability of schools and districts to implement reforms” (DeMitchell & Barton, 1996, p. 367). Meanwhile, observers who find teacher unions as obstacles to school reform are met with a plethora of contrary viewpoints. Divergent research has indicated that the role that teacher unions play in achieving reform initiatives is dependent upon the perspective of the observer. School principals tend to view union activities and the process of collective bargaining as a barrier to the collegiality necessary to inspire school reform. At the same time, union leaders and bargaining team members report that the collective bargaining process is necessary and beneficial in achieving school reform. Research further indicates that teachers in general (those not directly involved in union activity) are quite ambivalent regarding the effects of union activities and school reform, seeing no real connection between the two (DeMitchell & Barton, 1996).

To be certain, research has indicated that instances of effective labor and management relationships have been fruitful in achieving school reform:

To be sure, teacher unions strive, through negotiated labor-management agreements to ensure competitive salaries for their members. However, the notion that teacher unions are interested only in sustaining and improving salary levels belies an emerging truth in a small number of school district-union partnerships: namely that focusing on professional issues related to improving the quality of teaching and learning is good for the district and good for the union. (Koppich, 2005, p. 91)

Therefore, while teacher unions are primarily viewed as a means to ensure more comfortable employment terms for their members, unions also have, on occasion, been instrumental in reform initiatives such as those contained in the No Child Left Behind initiatives.

Teacher Unions and Wages and Benefits

From an overall perspective, U.S. teacher union activities have been successful in garnering increased salary, benefits, and improved working conditions for their members (Duplantis et al., 1995). Over the past 55 years, public school teacher salaries have risen dramatically as compared to the median income of fellow community members. In 1949-1950, teacher salaries were 3% higher than an average full-time employee, while that same figure had risen to 26% by 1992-1993 (Guthrie, 1997). Furthermore, the ratio of school employees to students has dropped dramatically in recent decades. Teachers are working with fewer students partially due to smaller class sizes and also due to an increase in the number of nonteacher support personnel that are employed by the schools. In 1949-50, a school employed approximately 1 employee for every 19 students. Currently, the ratio is less than 10 to 1.

Partial explanation for the rising salary and benefit packages made available to public school teachers is rooted in the research that proclaims that increased teacher salaries result in superior student achievement results (Figlio, 2002). Loeb and Page (2000) found that while controlling for other factors, a raise of teacher wages by 10% reduces high school dropout rates by 3% to 4%. Hanushek, Kain, and Rivkin (2004) also determined a relationship between salary and a teacher's willingness to stay employed at a particular district. However, other factors such as student characteristics (race and achievement) were found to be more statistically significant. An additional study by Brewer (1996) confirmed a relationship between salary and retention of teachers and also

found that opportunities for advancement into administrative ranks were motivational in the retention of teachers. Brewer states:

Higher districts salaries for new administrators in positions that teachers usually fill decrease the likelihood that a teacher will quit their district, *ceteris paribus*. Conversely, if salaries for new administrators rise in the surrounding districts in the county, teachers are more likely to quit their districts. (p. 333)

Furthermore, teacher longevity within a district has been tied to finance, in that districts who spend higher percentages of revenues on central administrative functions and for nonteachers, tend to lose teachers more quickly (Gritz & Theobald, 1996)

Districts can influence teacher attrition by looking for ways to lower spending for central administration and channel these funds towards teacher salaries. The context created by high central office spending increases the likelihood all teachers will leave a district. Funds allocated to teacher salaries, on the other hand, create an environment that increases the probability teachers will stay in the district. (Gritz & Theobald, 1996, p. 501)

Collective Bargaining Implications for the Superintendent

While teacher benefits and salary increases continue their upward trend, school superintendents are under greater challenge than perhaps at any other time in history to balance school budgets. With financial pressures on schools reaching ever-increasing levels, the mantra of running the school like a business has gained momentum over the past decade and an influx of superintendents with business or military experience has been increasingly prevalent (Howard & Preisman, 2007).

Under the proposed business model, the pressures of raising student achievement scores for school administrators may be matched only by the pressure to operate a financially solvent business. Conservative groups are regularly calling out for schools to adopt business model solutions such as consolidation of school services or consolidation

of one or more small school districts. The concept is to reduce the redundancy of employing multiple administrators and other specialized staff (Dodson & Garrett, 2004).

Privatization of noninstructional services such as custodial, janitorial, transportation, and food service programs has also been business-based reform model gaining momentum in recent years (Whitty & Power, 2000). Privatization, or the practice allowing for profit businesses to run various parts of school operations while being funded through public tax dollars, has been a contentious issue across Michigan and the United States over the past decade.

Teacher salary and benefits, consolidation, and privatization are currently matters for discussion in virtually every school district in Michigan. Every district superintendent must confront these issues with their communities as well as their teacher unions. Therefore, the struggle to reform schools and control costs has been left to local school districts to solve. Various educational observers have commented that the process is too overwhelming and disjointed when left in the hands of hundreds of local districts (Brown & McLaughlin, 1990). These observers propose that the change required within public schools will most likely occur only as a result of mandates and directives handed down from the federal and state government level.

Presently, Michigan superintendents are facing challenges on all fronts. Pressures for students to achieve academically are at an all-time high. No Child Left Behind has mandated that every student will be proficient within the next decade. EducationYES!, as implemented within the state of Michigan, annually assigns a letter grade to every public school building and district each year. Meanwhile, the Michigan state economy is experiencing a significantly poor period of revenue generation. Due to the funding

formula of Proposal A, the stagnation of the state economy results in a direct blow to the funding of public schools. Meanwhile, the cost of doing business continues to rise. At the same time, research shows that salary and benefit packages offered to teachers have an impact on the quality of personnel, their willingness to stay within a particular school districts, as well as the quality of results in terms of student achievement.

The process of collective bargaining, as managed by school superintendents in Michigan, encompasses all of these areas of challenge. The purpose of this study is to examine the lived experience of a sample of Michigan superintendents and to learn more about how these factors play out at the collective bargaining table. How do these school leaders juggle all of the various factors of successful school leadership? How do superintendents approach the bargaining process with teacher union leadership in order to achieve what is being mandated while remaining financially solvent and fostering a positive work environment? Can a balance be struck between academic leadership and financial leadership?

Collective bargaining within public schools represents a stage on which the superintendent has multiple objectives and interests, some of which may be conflicting in nature. This study aims to learn more about the complexity of this challenge and how it is managed by practicing superintendents.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The primary purpose of this study is to explore how selected superintendents are experiencing the collective bargaining process. Exploration includes an examination of the various roles that selected superintendents have played in the collective bargaining process.

Furthermore, exploration includes thematic areas of greatest challenges facing superintendents in recent collective bargaining negotiations. Particular emphasis is given to the rising cost of health care benefits.

Finally, this study synthesizes and develops, through analysis of responses given by the sample group of superintendents, emerging themes that indicate the range of strategies employed by superintendents within the collective bargaining process.

A phenomenological research design utilizing qualitative methods was used to explore and describe the experiences of selected superintendents within the collective bargaining process. This approach allowed the researcher to elicit rich descriptions of what superintendents are thinking and experiencing as they plan for and carry out their specific roles in collective bargaining with local district employee groups. Data were gathered by using an in-depth personal interview protocol, as well as focus group meetings with selected superintendents in this study.

Research Design

In selecting the appropriate research design for this study, careful consideration was given by the researcher regarding the most effective approach in addressing the research questions. Quantitative and qualitative studies both share the same goal of identifying clear and consistent patterns of phenomena by a systematic process (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). In this particular case, the researcher was seeking to know more about how superintendents are experiencing the collective bargaining process.

This study was designed to examine the lived experiences of selected superintendents in rural and small suburban school districts located in the Midwest. To investigate these experiences, a phenomenological design was been developed that entailed the collection of data from superintendents through personal interviews and focus groups meetings. With this type of approach, the researcher

identifies the “essence” of human experiences concerning a phenomenon, as described by participants in a study. Understanding the “lived experiences” marks phenomenology as a philosophy as well as a method, and the procedure involves studying a small number of subjects through extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationships of meaning. (Moustakas, cited in Creswell, 2003, p. 15)

The researcher chose focus group and in-depth personal interviews as the methodology most useful in reaching the deepest level of understanding possible. This form of qualitative study allows the interviewee to lead the researcher in directions that may have been originally unexpected. In this manner, the potential for greater understanding is not restricted by the researcher, or any quantitative tool that may have been utilized.

According to Charles and Mertler (2002), any research topic has to satisfy the “principle of importance” (p. 17). Qualitative researchers must ask themselves whether the research will contribute to human knowledge in a meaningful way. In this study, the principle of importance is satisfied in several ways. First and foremost, this study provides detailed insights into the various roles that superintendents play within the collective bargaining process. This study further contributes to the general body of knowledge in that it offers insights regarding strategies that superintendents feel are purposeful in the modern-day collective bargaining process. Engaging with subject superintendents before and immediately after collective bargaining sessions provides further insights into how subjects set goals, plan strategies, participate, and debrief collective bargaining experiences.

In light of NCLB, and relatively new accountability measures that public schools are now monitored by, a high degree of value is placed in learning more about the collective bargaining process. This study examines the thinking, strategies, interactions, and impact of experiences within the collective bargaining process for school district superintendents who bear responsibility for planning, conducting, and actively participating in that process. This study was organized in a fashion that allows a comparison of values, strategies, and tactics used at the collective bargaining table by experienced superintendents in comparison to less experienced superintendents. The value in this comparison is found in the distinctions made by the respective groups, the methods utilized, and the overall approaches that the two groups utilize within the collective bargaining process.

Data Collection Methodology

The investigator utilized personal and focus group interviews of selected superintendents as the primary mode for collecting data in this research study. All interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the identified respondents. Individual interviews were conducted in the office of the selected superintendent, while focus group interviews were conducted in a service agency located in a Midwestern community. In all interviews, the researcher sought to ensure that a quiet and comfortable location was provided and that the participants' anonymity was maintained at all times. Following each individual interview, the audio recording was transcribed by the researcher. Focus group interviews involved members of each focus group, or the researcher himself, manually recording the responses of group members. These data were collected and stored by the researcher.

The intent of qualitative research was honored throughout the data collection processes of this study. Therefore, the researcher did not overly confine the subject matter to be explored. Rather, the procedures used in this study provided participants with the atmosphere, and as little prompting as necessary, in order to lead the participants into conversations regarding relevant content (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). However, this study was not without focus. The researcher, in this study, was primarily interested in how public school superintendents who bear primary responsibility for and participate fully in the collective bargaining process prepare for, engage in, and debrief their collective bargaining experiences, given the current academic and economic climate in Michigan public schools. Within this specific area of focus, the freedom allowed by

qualitative methods is tempered only by the attention paid by the researcher to the exploration of how selected superintendents balance the competing demands of their time and responsibilities with the conflicting priorities that accompany the collective bargaining process. Concomitant with this matter is the equally growing concerns about limited financial resources, rapidly increasing employee benefit costs, and high levels of accountability for increased student performance.

The researcher in this study conducted all 10 of the in-depth personal interviews in advance of the focus group interviews. Five of the individually interviewed superintendents were highly experienced in collective bargaining, in that they have negotiated more than three contracts; five were less experienced in that they have negotiated fewer than five contracts. The separation of interviewees based on experience level enabled the researcher to analyze similarities and differences among the two groups. All individual interviews were conducted, transcribed, and analyzed for emergent themes in advance of conducting focus group interviews. The researcher selected the four most prevailing themes from the individual interviews to serve as prompts for the focus group interviews. In this way, the researcher intended to foster an environment for rich focus group discussions that will shed the greatest amount of light on the topic of collective bargaining strategies.

The purpose of using focus groups in this study was to observe the interaction among participants as they engaged with the themes that emerged from the one-on-one interviews with the first sample of 10 superintendents (Hatch, 2002). Grouping experienced superintendents separately from those with less experience allowed the two groups to share common understandings and to foster a richer interview session in that

ideas were shared and expanded on among interviewees with similar levels of experience in the superintendency and with managing the collective bargaining process as superintendents. The researcher utilized the focus group environment to create conversations that allowed the participants to share thoughts with one another and to explore the topic in great depth.

The first focus group consisted of eight veteran superintendents who have participated in the collective bargaining process for a minimum of three successfully negotiated contracts. The second focus group consisted of eight less experienced superintendents who have participated in the collective bargaining process for less than three successfully negotiated contracts. Each focus group discussion used emergent themes from the individual interviews as a starting point for discussion. In this way, the researcher sought to maximize the productivity of the focus group through starting the conversation around topics of high interest previously established by individual superintendent interviews. Focus group interviews were conducted with the intention of gaining understanding regarding the deepest levels of knowledge and experiences of selected superintendents and providing ample opportunity for the superintendents to expand fully on their experiences.

Subjects, Sampling, and Access

The subjects chosen for this study were a purposeful criterion sample from a convenience pool of 26 Midwestern school superintendents in relatively small rural and suburban school districts. These superintendents currently oversee school districts that range in size from approximately 800 students to 4,000 students.

In choosing the sample of superintendents to be utilized in this study, the researcher began by identifying superintendents known to have rich experiences in the collective bargaining process. Following the guidelines of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) of Western Michigan University, an invitation to participate in this study was sent to the 10 superintendents through the use of an e-mail correspondence. Interview questions to be utilized in the study were given to the sample superintendents as part of the invitation to participate. Prospective participants were given the opportunity to voluntarily take part in the study. Participants were informed of their right to not respond to any questions or group discussion, and, if need be, they could voluntarily withdraw from the interview or focus group at any point in time during the data collection process. The invitation communiqué contained a brief description of the study along with an invitation to participate and assurance that their responses would be kept anonymous. The sample superintendents were assured that their identities would be protected through the use of pseudonyms throughout the course of this study. The sample superintendents were asked to respond to the e-mail invitation within one week.

Research Questions

This study sought to provide answers to the following questions:

Question 1: How are selected superintendents experiencing the collective bargaining process?

Subquestion 1a: How are selected superintendents dealing with expenditure increases related to employee health care and retirement?

Subquestion 1b: How are selected superintendents dealing with pressures to increase student achievement at the bargaining table?

Question 2: What type of preparation and/or experiences do selected superintendents feel they need to serve as the district leader in the collective bargaining process?

Instrumentation

Data for this study were collected between December 2007 and March 2008. This included a minimum of two focus group interviews and 10 in-depth personal interviews. As Creswell (2003) suggests, the data collection process may change from the original blueprint as the study progresses. The nature of qualitative research dictates that the researcher adapt data collection methods dependent on emergent understanding and the spectrum of work required in order to build grounded theory.

The interview strategies utilized in this study involved unstructured and generally open-ended techniques. The number of prompts planned by the researcher were relatively few in number, following a design which allowed respondents freedom to expand answers fully. The interviewer provided a description of the study, an explanation of the research questions under examination, and key probes designed to address the research questions.

Data Analysis

For the purposes of this phenomenological study, the researcher followed an outline of data analysis proposed by Creswell (2003), which includes analysis of

interview transcripts for significant statements, coding statements into theme categories, and, finally, analysis and interpretation of emerging themes. Comparisons were drawn between the focus groups and the individuals in order to add to the reliability of the research results. The researcher also identified themes that emerged among the divergent groupings of superintendents with more experience in collective bargaining versus those with less experience.

Each theme group was labeled under a term selected by the researcher that generalized meaning that developed from the particular group. Emergent themes displayed multiple perspectives from study participants and were supported by diverse quotations and specific evidence as gained through the interview process. The researcher expected that significant overlap and connectedness would present among emergent theme groups. These connections were fully explored and discussed by the researcher.

Findings were validated through a member checking process (Creswell, 2003). Initial results and reporting of the transcribed interviews were presented to each interviewee to determine whether participants felt that the interpretation of the research was consistent with the intended meaning.

The researcher anticipated that the data analysis steps described above would not be neatly confined or able to be followed in a step-by-step fashion. The data analysis in this study involves theme categories that were developed on multiple levels as the constructivist approach unfolded.

Finally, based on the findings of the researcher through the interview analysis, the researcher posed questions for further study. At the conclusion of this study, all data were maintained and stored for a period of 5 years by the principal investigator.

The Researcher

The researcher in this study, who is a first-year superintendent, has an intrinsic interest in learning more regarding the collective bargaining process from fellow superintendents. The researcher possesses a background in school accountability issues, particularly student achievement initiatives as mandated by No Child Left Behind. Furthermore, while conducting this study, the researcher was actively involved in the collective bargaining process within the district that he leads.

Further justification for this study includes a relative lack of information available to guide local district superintendents regarding the various roles and responsibilities related to collective bargaining. This lack of information is particularly apparent given that the fact that the landscape of public education in light of No Child Left Behind, as well as budget uncertainties, continues to change at an extremely rapid pace. Superintendents who play a lead role in collective bargaining must balance their roles as instructional leaders, while at the same time serving as protector of a school district and its overall fiscal well-being. The researcher in this study, with a formal educational background as well as a background in an educational setting, is well-grounded in curriculum and school leadership and seeks to provide unique insights into the scope of responsibilities placed on superintendents as they are manifested within the collective bargaining process.

Study Delimitations and Limitations

A limitation that derives from the relationship between the researcher and this study is that the researcher might have been inclined to conduct interviews that probed areas of personal interest, rather than to proceed as is natural for the interviewees, as is required in the realm of qualitative research. Researcher bias is also an important consideration in any study. It is necessary for the researcher to acknowledge that he is a superintendent who experiences conditions similar to those described by the sample superintendents. The possibility does exist that the researcher possesses some degree of bias toward the subject matter, which may have influenced the study. This tendency was consciously monitored by the researcher to ensure that proper qualitative techniques were followed. Furthermore, this limitation is viewed by the researcher as a trade-off in light of the fact that a thorough basis of understanding and experience within the scope of the research topic provided benefits on many levels, including directional guidance and oversight as the study progressed.

It must also be noted that the results of this study are not widely generalizable to superintendents throughout the Midwest. Rather, they are limited to those superintendents who participated in the study and are concerned about their experiences in the collective bargaining process. Creswell (2003) states that any method of data collection has inherent limitations. Interviews were the primary method of data collection utilized in this study and did not take place in the natural environment of the phenomenon under investigation. Practicality and confidentiality dictate that the researcher is not able to be present for the actual collective bargaining sessions that the sample superintendents participate in.

Therefore, the responses given by the superintendents in regards to the experiences within the collective bargaining process are removed from the actual event of collective bargaining. Consequently, this study is limited to the respondents, and that the accounts of their actual thoughts and experiences are factual and accurate.

The scope of this study is limited to the lived experiences of 10 mid-Michigan school superintendents who have recent experiences with the collective bargaining process. This select group of individuals faces unique challenges and state economic climate conditions that may or may not be present in school districts outside of their immediate geographic area. Therefore, this study will be uniquely useful to the researcher and others interested in the current bargaining climate in relatively small Midwestern public school districts.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purposes of this study were to examine the experiences of selected Midwestern superintendents in the collective bargaining process and to synthesize and develop emerging themes that indicate strategies utilized by superintendents in small rural and suburban school districts.

In order to accomplish these purposes, the researcher selected a sample of 26 Midwestern public school superintendents who played an active role in the collective bargaining process. After selecting superintendents, the researcher collected information relative to the amount of experience superintendents had in terms of the number of contracts they had negotiated. In examining the data collected from superintendents, it was determined that 13 superintendents had bargained three or less contracts and 13 superintendents had bargained three or more contracts, respectively. The researcher also queried each superintendent participant regarding the role that each plays within the collective bargaining process.

Individual interviews were conducted with 10 of the 26 superintendents that had various experiences with the collective bargaining process. Five of the 10 superintendents had collectively bargained three or more teacher union contracts, while the remaining five superintendents had bargained three or less contracts. Individual superintendent

interviews averaged approximately 45 minutes in duration and followed the protocol documented in Appendix C.

After conducting interviews with the 10 superintendents who had varying amounts of experiences in the collective bargaining process, the researcher conducted two separate focus groups with 8 superintendents in each group. The focus group interviews were designed to gain a full and meaningful understanding of four emergent themes derived from the individually interviewed participants (Goebert & Rosenthal, 2002). The four prevailing themes developed through the individually interviewed superintendents were: informal and formal bargaining styles; open and honest communications; health insurance costs; and the final theme was a combination of prevailing bargaining topics including reduction of student days, total compensation, and reluctance to bargain long-term contracts due to revenue uncertainties. One focus group consisted of 8 superintendents who had collectively bargained three or more contracts, while the other focus group was made up of 8 superintendents who have collectively bargained less than three contracts.

Focus group discussions initiated with an explanation of the study and the four emergent themes that had developed through the 10 individual superintendent interviews. Poster boards portraying these four themes were displayed in view of focus group participants. The researcher opened the discussion and encouraged participation from each focus group participant. As focus group members developed conversation around the four themes, the researcher recorded key suggestions from the group on the poster boards. The role of the researcher in the focus group discussion was merely to redirect conversation as necessary to encourage the discussion toward explanation and hypotheses

generation regarding the themes that had emerged within the individual superintendent interviews (Goebert & Rosenthal, 2002).

At the conclusion of the focus group discussions, the researcher instructed each participant to utilize five star-shaped stickers that had been distributed prior to the discussion. Participants were instructed to place one star next to a particular statement on the poster board that was most characteristic of their own personal experience within collective bargaining within their school district. In this manner, the researcher was able to gauge which thoughts and ideas offered by the focus groups were most prevalent in the various school districts represented by each group. Prevailing focus group themes will be discussed within the findings and conclusions of this study.

The remainder of this chapter has been arranged into three sections. The first portion describes in greater detail the characteristics of the respondents. The second portion demonstrates the responses of the sample superintendents in relation to the research questions of this study. The final section summarizes the findings.

Participants

A total of 26 public school superintendents participated in this study. Of the 26 superintendents, 17 were male and 9 were female. Each participant was currently employed as a public school superintendent in small to midsize school districts in the lower western portion of the state of Michigan. This study focused upon rural and suburban superintendents who played an active role in the collective bargaining process. Furthermore, each superintendent in this study had experienced the role of lead negotiator at the collective bargaining table on behalf of the district and the local Board of

Education. Each respondent worked in a K-12 school district and student enrollment ranged from 600 students to over 4,000 students.

While this study separated the sample superintendents into two levels of experience regarding collective bargaining, that being those who had bargained three or more contracts and those with less than three contracts negotiated, the range in experience at the bargaining table was much more divergent than 3 years. One superintendent interviewed estimated that he had successfully negotiated more than 10 contracts with the teachers' association within his district and countless others with support staff such as paraprofessionals, custodians, and kitchen workers. On the other end of the spectrum, one superintendent's experience with negotiations was limited to bargaining one teacher union contract.

Participant Response Data

Table 1 represents a graphic cross-tabulation of thematic responses gathered by the researcher throughout the individual and focus group interviews. Emergent themes and subthemes are displayed along the left-hand column of Table 1. Each theme and subtheme is listed in association with a percentage of participants who supported the theme or subtheme within their individual or focus group interviews. Table 1 separates emergent themes and subthemes from those that were preframed by the researcher. The purpose of this separation is to draw distinction to those themes that emerged as a result of participant response, rather than as a formal plan developed by the researcher. Table 1 will be utilized as an illustrative frame of reference with respect to the findings and conclusions of this study.

Table 1

Emergent Themes and Subthemes by Superintendents' Level of Experience

Emergent Themes and Subthemes	Interviewed Less Experienced	Interviewed More Experienced	Focus Group Less Experienced	Focus Group More Experienced
Informal vs. Formal				
Preference for informal bargaining	40%	70%	50%	75%
Formalized beneficial after informal fails, and vice versa	0%	30%	12%	38%
Informal bargaining is daily and ongoing	30%	30%	50%	38%
Honest and Open				
Noted importance of honesty and openness	100%	100%	50%	38%
Superintendent longevity aids bargaining	0%	60%	0%	63%
Benefit of offering all district financial calculations	30%	50%	50%	63%
Pre-framed Themes and Subthemes	Interviewed Less Experienced	Interviewed More Experienced	Focus Group Less Experienced	Focus Group More Experienced
Health care/retirement costs of primary concern	100%	100%	100%	100%
Discussion of alternate insurance beneficial	30%	50%	25%	63%
Lack of union membership understanding concerning insurance	50%	30%	63%	38%
Focus on capping district insurance contributions	20%	60%	63%	38%
Lack of merit pay bargaining language	100%	100%	100%	100%
Reduction of student contact time	70%	70%	25%	50%
Total compensation	70%	70%	50%	38%
Short-term contracts	70%	70%	63%	38%
Emergent Themes and Sub Themes for Research Question 2	Interviewed Less Experienced	Interviewed More Experienced	Focus Group Less Experienced	Focus Group More Experienced
Lack of formal training	100%	100%	100%	100%

Research Question 1: How Are Selected Superintendents Experiencing the Collective Bargaining Process?

Formal Versus Informal

Throughout the 10 individual interviews, three distinct themes emerged in relation to the first research question of this study. Those themes were: a distinct preference by superintendents for what they referred to as informal negotiations versus a more formalized structure, a necessity for honest and open communications between all parties involved in the collective bargaining process, and a set of distinct issues that are prevailing topics of discussion at the bargaining table. These three themes, along with one other that will be detailed in relation to research subquestion 1a, developed as a result of the individual interviews with superintendents and were later utilized as a basis for focus group discussions.

Superintendents experiencing the collective bargaining process demonstrated a distinct preference for what they described as informal negotiations. For example, Table 1 illustrates that 70% of individually interviewed experienced superintendents prefer to bargain informally. When asked to define or describe the characteristics of either the formal or informal negotiations, one superintendent offered, "Formal is a more us versus them mentality with school attorneys and UniServ directors" (Personal Interview with Respondent, March 2008). On a consistent basis, when asked to expand upon the meaning of formal negotiations, superintendents referred to the presence of participants at the collective bargaining table who are not regular employees of the school district (i.e.,

attorneys and representatives from the Michigan Education Association, or more commonly referred to as UniServ directors).

The practice of bringing in outside representation, whether it is an attorney to negotiate for the Board of Education, or an MEA representative, was reported by each of the respondents in this study as having an overall negative effect on the process of collective bargaining. “Informal negotiations encourage open dialogue and better listening” (Personal Interview with Respondent, March 2008).

Several superintendents reflected on their various experiences of bargaining contracts in a formal manner, characterized by the presence of outside MEA representation as well as attorneys representing the Board of Education. One superintendent noted, “Now one year they brought in a negotiator. That changes everything. When they bring somebody from the MEA in, they’re ruthless; you have to change your whole strategy with how you’re going to bargain” (Personal Interview with Respondent, March 2008).

When probed further to explain the perceived benefits of informal negotiations, one superintendent stated:

I think the informal style cuts a lot of the personalities out of it. I don’t like it when you get lawyers at the table because they don’t have to live with it. They can sit across the table and call names and make hard feelings. And when the contract settles, no matter who ends up winners and losers, they walk away and they don’t have to deal with the employees on a daily basis like you and I do, or like a principal does. (Personal Interview with Respondent, March 2008)

Throughout the course of this study, each superintendent who responded regarding this topic emphasized the preference for informal negotiations. Informal negotiations were often characterized by superintendents as casual discussions, devoid of

technical protocol and grandstanding perceived to be inherent with a more formalized bargaining structure. One superintendent further characterized his distaste for formalized bargaining with respect to one particular contract that he had negotiated:

So we did everything according to the rules. The board hired a negotiator, they (the MEA) had their negotiator, and we yelled at each other, we pounded the table, we walked out, and they walked out. It was like a card game. You know whose deal it is. You know who's gonna win this hand and who's gonna win the next hand. If I had to go back to the formal way, I wouldn't be involved. I would rather have a person come in and talk to me and settle an issue than deal with something through an attorney or something like that. (Personal Interview with Respondent, March 2008)

Another superintendent concurred and added, "For me, an adversarial relationship was disastrous. I realized that there was no way I was going to make any progress doing things the old way. That to me was a huge failure" (Personal Interview with Respondent, March 2008).

As a result of the aversion to formalized bargaining, superintendents shared their strategies for avoidance of this particular method of negotiations. Respondents noted that in the majority of their experiences, union representatives within their district also understood that formalized negotiations, characterized by representation from lawyers and MEA representatives, may often be less harmonious than a more informal structure. Therefore, superintendents often seek an understanding that the administration and school board will not employ such approaches, if there is an agreement that the union group will also not seek outside representation. One superintendent explained his approach toward conversion from the formalized approach to a more informal bargaining structure:

I said fine, I'll remove the attorney when you remove the UniServ director. They came back and said, OK, that's fine. We came in, laid down the ground rules, nothing real formal and we started the process in April, and we were done by June. (Personal Interview with Respondent, March 2008)

An additional tendency noted by superintendents was that in several instances, informal negotiations can ultimately solve the issues that seem unsolvable within the more formalized structure. One superintendent summarized, “There seems to be a tendency to start formal, but a final agreement is made informally” (Personal Interview with Respondent, March 2008). This superintendent went on to explain that when outside negotiators have reached the limits of their ability to work toward an agreement, it is not uncommon that district personnel can meet in their absence and work out an agreement that may have been elusive in the more formalized setting.

Each of the two focus groups in this study was presented with the prevailing theme regarding superintendent preference for informal negotiations. The focus group consisting of relatively inexperienced superintendents emphasized the belief that informal negotiations happen on a daily basis, rather than confinement to the bargaining table. This concept received four stars out of a possible eight, indicating one of the most prevailing subthemes experienced by inexperienced superintendents relative to the theme of informal versus formal negotiations.

The more experienced focus group supported the belief that informal negotiations encourage greater scope of dialogue, better listening on behalf of all parties, and the possibility for more creative solutions within the bargaining process. This concept was supported by six out of a possible eight stars and was the most highly supported discussion point to emerge from the group of more experienced superintendents.

Throughout the research, superintendents were nearly unanimous in their distaste for formal bargaining structures. Respondents characterized formal negotiations with the

presence of outside representation serving as lead negotiators. “I think that as long as the MEA is involved, I think it is going to be rancorous” (Personal Interview with Respondent, March 2008).

Open and Honest

A second prevailing theme that emerged from respondents was the importance of what they most commonly referred to as open and honest communication. Each of the 10 individually interviewed respondents raised the issue of open and honest communications at some point in their dialogue.

When probed further regarding the meaning of this mantra, a common explanation involved providing everyone at the bargaining table, including union representation, with the same facts and figures utilized by the board and administration to determine what a fair settlement might include. One superintendent summarized:

I think the key when you're negotiating is constant communication. I've talked to our entire staff at building meetings, staff meetings, and they're very clear on how much our fund equity is dwindling and they know the next contract is going to look pretty bleak. (Personal Interview with Respondent, March 2008)

Another superintendent concurred, “Open and honest means providing lots of documentation such as the annual audit, pro-ration information, per-pupil funding, et cetera” (Personal Interview with Respondent, March 2008).

Several respondents noted their opinion that the effectiveness of open and honest communication was a function of their length of tenure within a particular district. As one superintendent eloquently summarized:

My philosophy of negotiations is all a matter of trust. And how is trust? Trust is built up over time. When you're a new person, brand new, they're going to look at

you like, who are you? And then if you do always keep your word, in other words, your word has to be golden, the process will become much more simplified. (Personal Interview with Respondent, March 2008)

An additional superintendent echoed this sentiment:

I think, in my situation, this is my 11th year. When you have a superintendent that's been around a number of years, and we've had board members who have been around a long time, you build up that stability, hopefully integrity. When you have that, you know it allows you to do some of the things we've done over the last contracts. It's very helpful. Then you tie that to constant communication and you know, nothing's guaranteed, but I think it makes it a little easier. (Personal Interview with Respondent, March 2008)

Expanding further on the importance of open and honest communications, several superintendents suggested that openness and honesty need to be ever-present, not solely utilized at the time of bargaining.

You just can't go up to people and be nice to them and talk to them once you got the bond on the ballot, because they see through that and they say, yeah he's just buttering us up because he wants us to vote yes. You need to have rapport and conversation all the time with people, even when you're not trying to negotiate and sell them something. (Personal Interview with Respondent, March 2008)

Respondents also concurred that openness and honesty are manifested through avoidance of making bargaining offers that do not represent a realistic settlement. In other words, responding superintendents noted that making excessively low salary offers, or limited insurance benefits as a starting point from which to bargain upward, is not conducive to the open and honest approach that they find most effective. "Don't play numbers games," noted one experienced superintendent. Another superintendent added:

When we talk, it's a trust thing. They say, what do you think we're going to finally settle at? And I say, we can go at two percent. Now, do I start at one-half percent and they start at six percent? The answer is, no. I lay it on the table and I say, this is it folks. I say look, this is how much revenue we're projecting, here's a

pot of money, now you split it. Do you want it for insurance, or do you want it for salaries? (Personal Interview with Respondent, March 2008)

After the theme of openness and honesty had clearly emerged from responding superintendents, this theme was developed further with each of the two focus groups. Focus groups discussions focused on how openness and honesty manifest in the collective bargaining process.

Similar to the responses gathered from superintendents in personal interviews, respondents in the lesser experienced focus group emphasized that openness and honesty is an important foundation upon which relationship-building is an important feature that must take place prior to the bargaining process. This group further emphasized the concept that having a reputation of being “honest” is an important asset, and that this concept is in constant development on a daily basis. When asked to rate the importance of these concepts, “openness” and “honesty” received the highest amount of support as evidenced by the placement of four stars next to each concept out of a possible number of eight stars.

The focus group comprised of experienced superintendents placed three stars next to each of the concepts of “openness” and “honest” out of a possible eight. The more experienced focus group emphasized the sharing of vital documentation relative to any offer that the district intended to make. This concept was also supported by 50% of the experienced superintendents who were interviewed individually. Discussion developed around providing union representatives with all budget information, audit information, or any other documentation requested by the union group. Furthermore, the more experienced focus group emphasized the importance of helping to interpret the

documents when necessary, rather than simply providing the information. Finally, the experienced focus group emphasized the importance of being absolutely clear in communication regarding what the districts goals and objectives were for the bargaining process, avoiding any surprises late in the bargaining process.

Openness and honesty were described by superintendents in this study as key factors in successful collective bargaining. Openness and honesty are manifested through the provision of all available data to all bargaining participants, regardless of which side of the table. In addition, explanation of the data is also critical. One superintendent noted regarding future negotiations strategy, “We’re going to try and be proactive and educate the teachers before we get started” (Personal Interview with Respondent, March 2008).

Prevailing Topics

A third theme that emerged while respondents described their experiences within the collective bargaining process is best described as a combination of the most prevailing topics experienced during recent bargaining sessions. Seven of the 10 individually interviewed superintendents cited the reduction of days to the student calendar, the concept of total compensation, and due to the uncertain financial condition in the Midwest, a hesitancy to negotiate contracts in excess of 2 years.

Reduction of Student Contact Time. As stated previously, seven of 10 individually interviewed superintendent participants noted their experience with the proposition of reducing the number of days that students attend school as a matter of collective bargaining. Respondents noted that while they found the idea of reducing learning time

for students to be undesirable, current economic conditions in Michigan have made it difficult to operate a school district for more days and hours than are mandated. One superintendent noted, "Cutting days hurt student achievement. However, we have cut days in lieu of salary increases. When you have no fund equity, the only thing you have left to bargain with is time" (Personal Interview with Respondent, March 2008).

Other superintendents noted that they had taken a more firm stance against the concept of reducing student contact time, or lengthening the school day in order to reduce the number of days. Anticipating future contract negotiations, one superintendent lamented:

The big battle we'll have, I won't pull any punches; I think it's disgusting, you have staff that are hell-bent on reducing their days. I just don't see the manner of adding five minutes and subtracting days off the calendar. I see that as a huge negotiating tactic. It's like using the financial matters of the state as an excuse. (Personal Interview, with Respondent March 2008)

Upon conducting focus group discussions, the group consisting of more experienced superintendents had the greatest input relative to the theme of reducing student contact time. Four out of eight stars were given to the suggestion made by one of the participants that research demonstrates that a reduction of student contact time has a negative impact on student achievement.

Total Compensation. Responding superintendents noted that in an environment of diminishing revenues, it is increasingly important to emphasize to staff the total benefit package that each faculty member receives. Often, according to respondents, staff members consider their income, or cost to the district, to be comprised solely of their

salary and may not acknowledge or understand their total compensation package. One superintendent explained:

I think it's important to keep in front of our teachers the concept of total compensation. When I would say a third-year teacher makes \$68,000, I would get statements, "That's not true." And of course I was prepared to explain FICA, insurance, et cetera, but often that is not viewed as income to employee groups. (Personal Interview with Respondent, March 2008)

Another superintendent concurred, "When we give staff a 2% salary increase, that may equal a 5% increase in total compensation. I think that is important for people to understand" (Personal Interview with Respondent, March 2008).

While superintendents emphasized dwindling fund-balances and tough economic times within public school systems, several participants also acknowledge that they dislike the position that they are forced to take within the collective bargaining process. Many superintendents conveyed a belief that staff members deserve more compensation than they feel they can responsibly offer at the bargaining table. As one superintendent explained:

I think teachers deserve more than what they get. With the economy the way it is right now, I'm not sure how you do that. You want to give them something, but you look at your fund equity and I'm not sure how you do that. It's difficult to give them what they deserve. And then do you want to cut back on time for kids? I don't think so. These are the things we have to bargain with. (Personal Interview with Respondent, March 2008)

In focus group discussions, the group of lesser experienced superintendents had significant input relative to total compensation. The group awarded four stars out of a possible eight to the suggestion that the total cost of compensation for employees should be placed on the individual contracts that they sign each school year. This focus group elaborated that personnel contracts should be used as a tool for building understanding

regarding total benefits, as well as total annual increase in the cost of those benefits to all school district personnel. This focus group discussion further supported findings from individually interviewed inexperienced superintendents in which 70% of participants had noted similar assertions relative to total compensation.

Short-term Contracts. The theme of diminishing resources also prompted responding superintendents to comment on their hesitancy to negotiate what they termed as long-term contracts. One superintendent noted:

I don't think you can negotiate three-year contracts anymore. Now it's two at most. You can't project far enough ahead. We don't know what our revenue is going to be. The uncertainty tells me that you cannot have long contracts anymore for money matters. (Personal Interview with Respondent, March 2008)

In summarizing the findings relative to research question 1, responses from superintendents shed light on how these individuals are experiencing the collective bargaining process. The superintendent participants in this study are each highly involved in the collective bargaining process within their respective school districts. In bearing this responsibility, superintendents unanimously indicated their preference for a less formalized negotiating environment. Characteristics of less formalized negotiations, as described by responding participants, include the absence of outside legal council or MEA representation. Superintendents prefer a more casual conversation around the issues. This conversation is most suitable, according to respondents, in an environment of trust, born from openness, honesty, and time-tested relationships built between the superintendent and the union staff members.

Superintendent challenges at the bargaining table regularly include the concepts of reduction of student contact time, total compensation considerations, and hesitancy to

negotiate contract terms in excess of 2 years. In relation to research question 1, superintendent respondents have clearly painted a picture that reveals the challenges that these leaders face at the bargaining table.

Research Subquestion 1a: How Are Selected Superintendents Dealing With Expenditure Increases Related to Employee Health Care and Retirement?

Health Care Costs

Without exception, all respondents in this study commented extensively on the problem presented by the rising cost of health care benefits to employees. In light of all factors discussed at the bargaining table, one superintendent explained, “Insurance has been the most critical topic, but the most difficult to budge or make headway on” (Personal Interview with Respondent, March 2008). Responding superintendents consistently referred to the Union insurance as a comparatively expensive product that many teacher unions are accustomed to utilizing, and one with which the unions are reluctant to part. One superintendent explained that working with teachers to discuss an alternative to the Union insurance has long been a difficult initiative, “Well, it has not become a problem just lately; it has been a problem since I started seventeen years ago” (Personal Interview with Respondent, March 2008).

Responding superintendents regularly noted that from their perspective, there exist insurance providers offering equivalent benefits at a lesser cost. One superintendent explained, “It’s nothing against MESSA, but it’s too expensive” (Personal Interview with Respondent, March 2008).

Many superintendents, faced with a historical precedent of Union insurance offerings within their district, struggle to convince staff members to explore other options. In fact, attempting to explain, or convince, employee groups to consider other insurance options is viewed by several respondents as precisely the wrong way to inspire staff to consider alternatives to the Union insurance program.

Several superintendents who experienced success in the reduction of health care cost liabilities to their school districts shared their bargaining strategies. Two of the 10 respondents independently echoed a very similar approach: “We didn’t care what kind of benefits the teachers had, MESSA, Blue Cross, Mutual of Omaha, didn’t matter, we wanted them to have quality insurance, but we also wanted to control the district cost” (Personal Interview with Respondent, March 2008).

Another superintendent respondent offered a similar response:

In the essence, it wasn’t my concern what kind of insurance they had. I was trying to look at the cost factor. So, in the end, we don’t care what you have, the bottom line is, this is what we’re going to spend. So, we basically said, it’s up to you, you know what the tolerance of the board is, and what we’re going to pay. You go out and do the research and find something different. If you want to pay \$200 a month (for the Union insurance), then go for it. (Personal Interview with Respondent, March 2008)

Several respondents indicated that they encouraged union staff to explore other insurance alternatives by raising their monetary contribution rate. In this manner, superintendents suggested that there was less need for the superintendent to convince staff members about the need to look for a less costly alternative. Instead, the board and the superintendent were able to successfully negotiate a limit, or cap, on the expenditures the district was willing to make towards insurance benefits. Once that cap is exceeded, as the superintendents explained, any remaining costs are the responsibility of the employee.

“If staff pays the excess,” one superintendent noted, “they will be more likely to look for a better priced product. It’s a matter of motivation” (Personal Interview with Respondent, March 2008).

Another strategy offered by superintendents as a method of reducing health care costs to the district was to have staff members pick up a percentage of the insurance premiums, often referred to as a soft-cap. However, as respondents explained, whenever an increase in staff member contribution toward insurance is negotiated successfully, it often comes in exchange for concessions in the form of increased salary benefits. One superintendent explained the relationship between salary and insurance within his school district:

They said that they would be willing to pay for 10% of their health insurance, which was unheard of at the time, in exchange for the good Union product. They said they would take less in terms of wages, so we thought that was a good tradeoff. But then, as the rates started to soar, that was not a good tradeoff for them. Four years ago we settled our contract and they were so willing to keep the Union Supercare that they were willing to pay an even greater percentage of their insurance premiums in exchange for a reasonable salary increase. (Personal Interview with Respondent, March 2008)

The theme of controlling health insurance costs was also presented as a focus group discussion point. The focus group consisting of less experienced superintendents suggested that one difficulty in overcoming the high cost of MESSA insurance is what they described as the “brainwashing” of teacher membership groups. When asked to describe this concept further, the less experienced group noted a perception that many teachers who are not directly part of the bargaining process tend to believe that the Union insurance is the best product available, and any deviation from this particular provider would result in vastly inferior service. This suggestion was supported by the group with

five star stickers out of a possible eight and represented the idea most strongly supported by this focus group.

The focus group consisting of more experienced superintendents emphasized the concept that moving away from Union insurance was of key concern within their districts. Additionally, more experienced superintendents who took part in focus group discussions emphasized a hard-cap on insurance expenditures as the most effective method of controlling health insurance costs to the school district. Each of the preceding two concepts suggested by the experienced group of superintendents received three stars out of a possible eight and were the suggestions receiving the greatest support relative to the health care cost theme.

In summary, the cost of insurance benefits for staff members is at the forefront of concerns in terms of the superintendent participants in this study. On a consistent basis, superintendent interviewees indicated the shared opinion that Union insurance was not the most cost effective product available. Respondents indicated a common theme that there exists a direct relationship between union employee contribution rates to the expensive Union product, and their willingness to consider other less costly options.

Research Subquestion 1b: How Are Selected Superintendents Dealing With Pressures to Increase Student Achievement at the Bargaining Table?

Throughout the personal interviews, as well as the focus groups, conducted in this study, each of the superintendents offered a surprisingly similar response with respect to student achievement issues at the bargaining table. Not a single superintendent interviewed had directly incorporated the concept of student achievement into a collective

bargaining agreement. When probed to expand upon possible efforts to tie student achievement scores to staff compensation, responding superintendents demonstrated a lack of faith that such an agreement would be possible. One superintendent, when asked if the concept of increased compensation for improved standardized test scores, had ever been considered at the bargaining table, recalled:

No, I doubt if that concept will ever come up. I doubt that teachers would ever listen to it. If I were teaching, my position would be I do not control enough of the variables for you to base my pay on merit pay. If you can give me control over variables, then I'd be happy to do it. So, if you can give me a viable measurement tool, I might think about that. (Personal Interview with Respondent, March 2008)

Another responding interviewee commented that he was not interested in raising the topic of increased compensation for improved student achievement scores:

I try to make sure merit pay doesn't come up. I'm not sure how to do that fairly to everybody concerned. I don't want to get into a battle if I'm not sure how you can do that across the board to be fair to everybody. (Personal Interview with Respondent, March 2008)

Throughout the data collection process, there was no example of a successful bargaining agreement that demonstrated a direct relationship between student achievement and employee benefits. However, one superintendent explained that student achievement is truly an ever-present concern, even when direct language associating achievement to benefits may not be present:

Student achievement is always, to me, at the forefront of what you're trying to accomplish. So, any language, whether it's prep hours, minutes for prep time, you know, it's all related to how does it contribute to better student achievement. So I think it's just one thing, it's all of your negotiating you have to keep that at the forefront. (Personal Interview with Respondent, March 2008)

Student achievement, while at the forefront of concerns among the responding superintendents, was not found to be a concept of direct integration into the collective

bargaining process. It is a concept that is more implied, rather than actually stated in a labor agreement. Responding superintendents expressed they incorporated indirect bargaining influences they felt had an influence on increasing student achievement. Respondents indicated that they worked tirelessly to minimize reduced student contact time, rather than bargaining language that ties staff compensation to student achievement scores.

Research Question 2: What Type of Preparation and/or Experience Do Selected Superintendents Feel They Need in Order to Serve as the District Leader in the Collective Bargaining Process?

Among the sample superintendents, the majority had very little experience or training in the collective bargaining process prior to being hired as superintendent. As one respondent explained:

It was sink or swim for me, because I had not negotiated for either side of the table in my former district. I had one class on negotiations in graduate school. But I didn't think that was real helpful considering the details of an entire school district. Then once I got the job, I was really thrown into negotiation right away. (Personal Interview with Respondent, March 2008)

The phrase "sink or swim" was used several times by responding superintendents throughout this study. When considering the professional development or collective bargaining training sessions offered to responding superintendents, participants in this study described it as being minimal. As one superintendent explained:

I haven't sought out any formal training. I feel fairly confident in what I'm trying to do, and whenever I get to a sticky spot, I bring the district's lawyer in and they can kind of guide you to the next step. (Personal Interview with Respondent, March 2008)

Other superintendents placed more emphasis on attending various training seminars regarding collective bargaining process. One respondent indicated:

I do go to state negotiators association conferences. I think it's important to do that, keep updated as far as what's going on, as far as average increases across the state, what's going on with schools your size. I think you have to stay on top of that kind of stuff at all times. (Personal Interview with Respondent, March 2008)

Nevertheless, the vast majority of superintendents in this study commented that the process of bargaining is something best learned through the actual experience of working within the process. As one highly experienced superintendent explained:

Certainly, I had taken a course in negotiations, and I'm not saying that's not important. But where I really got my training was on the job training. I worked in personnel in a larger district for years and I was assistant to the personnel director. I sat in negotiations and watched and learned. And then he had me do a lot of the assistant work and then after a year of that I negotiated the smaller contracts like the secretaries. So, most of the training I had came on the job. (Personal Interview with Respondent, March 2008)

Further research findings with respect to the types of training superintendents feel they need prior to bargaining, indicate mixed results as to the value of formalized training. As one superintendent stated:

Taking a formal class about negotiations may be helpful, just as taking a class about teaching methods may be helpful. However, until you sit down at the table, or stand in front of a class of students, you're never going to really know what it's like. You have to go through the real thing in order to learn. (Personal Interview with Respondent, March 2008)

Another participant in the study offered his thoughts regarding possible content of formalized training:

I think maybe a good thing to have formalized training on would be how to prepare for union strategies or how to prepare your facts and figures before you go into bargaining. I think successful bargaining is a result of a lot of good preparation, and a beginner could use some instruction on how to be prepared for negotiations. (Personal Interview with Respondent, March 2008)

In summarizing the responses of superintendents pertaining to training for the collective bargaining process, the 26 superintendent participants in this study clearly conveyed that the process is something they learned mostly through experience, rather than formalized training. Formalized training, as described by the superintendents is a worthwhile venture, but not sufficient preparation for the actual process. As one superintendent summarized, "I will never have all of the training that I need. There are too many crucial issues and it is very political right now, especially at the bargaining table" (Personal Interview with Respondent, March 2008).

Summary of Findings

The findings in this study suggest that rural and suburban superintendents in Midwestern Michigan school districts have a distinct preference for collective bargaining in an environment free from outside influences such as contracted attorneys and NEA union representatives. In addition, respondents emphasized the importance of open and honest communication among all parties in the bargaining process. Openness and honesty were characterized by respondents as a willingness to share all data necessary to the bargaining process, to maintain credibility, and to perpetually conduct oneself in a trustworthy and consistent fashion.

This study also found that budget difficulties including health insurance costs, reduction of student contact time, total compensation, and uncertainty about long-term contracts, are some of the difficult topics regularly discussed at the bargaining table. Findings in this study also suggested that superintendents are seeking out bargaining strategies that shift some of the burden of rising costs to union employees. This method,

as explained by the participants, is one method that has met with some measure of success with respect to bargaining union concessions in terms of employee benefit costs.

Student achievement, while acknowledged by all participants as the critical mission of the school district, has not directly manifested itself in collective bargaining agreements. Every respondent noted indirect links from the bargaining table to student achievement. However, no responding superintendent had successfully negotiated any language that ties student achievement with employee compensation.

Finally, further findings suggest that formal training for superintendents with respect to the collective bargaining process is a luxury usually not enjoyed to any great extent by the majority of participating superintendents. Each respondent noted that training for collective bargaining, while potentially valuable, is not something they had an opportunity to participate in prior to accepting the responsibility of leading the bargaining process in their school district.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore the challenges faced by superintendents in selected Midwestern school districts in the collective bargaining process. This study included an examination of the contextual roles superintendents played as they sought to reach settlement agreements with their teacher bargaining groups. Finally, of necessity, the study identified a number of thematic areas that posed as barriers, as well as challenges, to superintendents that underwent the collective bargaining process in small to midsize suburban school districts in selected Midwestern school districts.

The intent of this chapter is to: (a) interpret and discuss the findings within the constraints of the study and in light of other related literature, (b) make concluding statements about the research findings, and (c) suggest recommendations for further study.

Summary of Findings

A determination of how selected superintendents were experiencing the collective bargaining process was the primary objective of this study, as evidenced by research question 1. An analysis of interview and focus group data revealed that superintendents would prefer to bargain contracts informally between union members and the superintendents, rather than including board-supported attorneys and union-supported

(Uni-serv) directors. Selected superintendent overwhelmingly reported that they felt formalized negotiations, in the presence of professional negotiators such as attorneys or NEA representatives, were less efficient and productive than a more informal style. The phenomenon of superintendents demonstrating a preference for informal bargaining structures is supported, to a great extent, by previous studies including DeMitchell and Barton (1996), who chronicled the perceived negative impact of union representation upon the collective bargaining process.

When considering the experience level of selected superintendents, it appears that the more experienced superintendents focused on the fact that informal bargaining structures offer more productive discussion, while recognizing that in certain environments, formalized negotiations may be necessary. This subgroup of selected superintendents emphasized that informal bargaining may become increasingly successful after formalized bargaining has reached a stalemate. Meanwhile, with respect to informal and formalized bargaining, the less experienced superintendents suggested that informal negotiations are highly preferable, and that the climate for this style of bargaining is created through ongoing conversations around bargaining topics, rather than being confined to the bargaining table.

Further interpretation of the finding relative to informal bargaining structures suggests that superintendents prefer to bear the responsibility for the bargaining process, rather than relying on outside assistance. This acceptance of the ultimate responsibility for the process further explains several examples offered by participants who noted that the informal structure allows for more latitude and flexibility within the bargaining process. For example, several participants referred to the effectiveness of sidebar

discussions and off-the-record proposals. The implication with respect to these findings is that participants favor the availability of as many options as possible toward reaching compromises and finding solutions to bargaining issues.

Having an atmosphere of openness and honesty were perceived by participating superintendents as being an integral factor in reaching a successor agreement. Koppich (2005) found similar trends including the perception that an open dialogue around professional issues may provide a direct relationship to improvement of the overall school site operation. Furthermore, understanding that no leader would suggest dishonesty or secretiveness in the collective bargaining process, responding superintendents suggested that open and honest negotiations are characterized by a willingness by both parties to share any and all data that the district has collected and maintained to determine compensation offers made at the bargaining table. Studies conducted by Gritz and Theobald (1996) supported the finding that transparency with district finance information is conducive to improved staff morale and improved teacher retention rates, in addition to enhancing the productivity of collective bargaining sessions.

The concept of deliberately offering and explaining all district data and documentation relative to an offer was most strongly supported by superintendents who were members of the more experienced subgroup. Responding superintendents noted that openness and honesty are not qualities that can simply be summoned at the time of bargaining. Findings in this study also suggested that superintendents who have established a reputation for trust and integrity, over a significant time period, experienced more harmony and efficiency in reaching a successor agreement, as compared to those superintendents who may have experienced less time to develop a trust relationship with

the union leadership within their district. Bjork and Lindle (2001) supported the necessity for school superintendents to operate in a transparent manner as they “work in environments of participatory decision-making, shared governance, and highly dynamic political interests” (p. 79.)

Findings further suggest that the cost of employee health insurance is of primary concern to superintendents as they approach the bargaining process. Data from both individual interviews and focus groups indicated that the cost of State Teacher Union Insurance (MESSA) is a key concern among superintendents. Furthermore, findings in this study suggest that superintendents who have presented alternative insurance provider information at the bargaining table have realized a greater likelihood of increased staff contributions toward the costs of MESSA premiums. According to participants in this study, union membership frequently opts toward contributing a larger percentage of their income toward maintaining MESSA insurance, rather than change insurance providers. An examination of the literature around the finding that union personnel may prefer to increase contribution rates in order to maintain preferred providers did not provide definitive results. Therefore, this finding may prove to be a localized, or relatively new phenomenon, as rising insurance premium costs necessitate increased product value comparisons from the perspectives of Boards of Education and school administration.

While both the experienced and less experienced superintendents shared the common perception that MESSA health insurance plans were not the most cost-effective, these two subgroups offered differing perspectives regarding how to manage this concern at the bargaining table. The less experienced participants consistently focused on what they perceived as a lack of understanding regarding insurance benefit costs and options

among the general membership of teaching staff members within their district. The lesser experienced superintendents forwarded the notion that greater efforts on the part of the superintendent to increase awareness may result in increased willingness on the part of staff members to consider other less costly insurance options. Meanwhile, more experienced superintendents focused primarily on the concept of encouraging bargaining agreements which result in limiting or capping school district liability toward future insurance cost increases. The more experienced superintendents repeatedly emphasized the mantra of less concern about who the insurance provider may be, and greater concern about the total cost to the school district.

Given current economic concerns, including the increasing mean age of teachers, the rising cost of health care insurance will likely continue to persist as a primary area of concern for school superintendents well into the future (Courant & Loeb, 1997). Guthrie (1997) found that the overall effect of teacher unionization over the past several decades has been to consistently increase the wages and benefits of its members. In addition, wage and benefit increases among the teaching profession since the proliferation of unionization have outpaced those of most other occupations.

Student achievement, while acknowledged by all participants as the critical mission of the school district, has not been an issue that posed a particular problem to the collective bargaining process. While each of the responding superintendents indicated that the issue of increasing student performance has not served as a barrier to negotiate successor agreements, they felt that they were able to address this issue indirectly through "side bars" away from the bargaining table. Previous research supports the finding that union leadership, as well as administration, is very concerned about student achievement

issues (Koppich, 2005). Interestingly, none of the participating superintendents in this study had successfully negotiated language in their collective bargaining agreements that would link student achievement scores to employee compensation.

While the No Child Left Behind law of 2002 “represents the most significant overhaul and expansion of the federal role in education since the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965” (McGuinn, 2005, p. 41), its relative influence on influencing student accountability measures has been minimal. Findings in this study suggest that both Boards of Education, as well as union personnel, are reluctant to bargain a relationship between student achievement scores and staff compensation. Teachers’ unions have long been opposed to the methods employed by number of achievement initiatives mandated by No Child Left Behind (Koppich, 2005). Meanwhile, according to the findings in this study, administrators and Boards of Education have many of the same concerns regarding the prudence of negotiating language that would tie student performance to staff compensation.

And finally, in relation to research question 2 of this study, findings suggest that formal training for superintendents with respect to the collective bargaining process is not a prerequisite for leading a school district’s bargaining process. Each participating superintendent noted the lack of formal training in the collective bargaining process prior to assuming the role of the superintendency. While each of the participating superintendents did not have any kind of training in this area, he or she recognized the importance of being versed in this area and felt the need for support in this area.

Conclusions

This study sought to provide answers to two major questions. The first question posed an examination of how superintendents in Midwestern rural and suburban public school districts are experiencing the collective bargaining process. The second question pertained to the preparation and experiences that superintendents perceive to be beneficial as they prepare for leadership roles within the collective bargaining process.

The researcher allowed the voices of participants to be carried forward into the study's manuscript. As a goal, the researcher intended to expose common themes faced by superintendents at the bargaining table in light of the current economic conditions in the Midwest, as well as the pressures faced by superintendents due to the onslaught of the No Child Left Behind legislation.

The results of the study demonstrated that superintendents across 26 Midwestern school districts experienced very similar thematic areas of challenges relative to the collective bargaining process. Findings indicate that budget difficulties and the rising cost of health insurance are issues to be dealt with at every school bargaining table across Michigan.

This study adds to the body of knowledge with respect to collective bargaining by shedding light on a set of well-defined beliefs modern superintendents hold regarding how to best foster a productive collective bargaining environment. According to the sample of rural and suburban Michigan superintendents in this study, integrity and honesty developed over time are essential in building the type of relationship that superintendents describe as most conducive to successful bargaining. In addition,

superintendents are clear in their preference for this trust-relationship to play out in the form of informal conversations between the vested parties, rather than a more formalized bargaining environment. The body of literature available prior to this study has yet to detail this strong and consistent preference of superintendents to bargaining contracts in the absence of professional negotiators, either in support of the union or the Board of Education. The implication that follows as a result of this finding is that Boards of Education would do well to examine carefully the possibility of fostering such an informal bargaining atmosphere as they prepare for future bargaining sessions.

A further contribution of this study lies in the conclusion that superintendents in rural and suburban school districts regularly enter into the process of collective bargaining with little or no formal training. The text of this study opened by detailing the precarious financial situation of modern public schools in Michigan, as well as elaborating on heightened expectations with respect to student achievement, as prescribed by No Child Left Behind. Therefore, the degree of difficulty, and the critical nature of establishing responsible contract settlements may be more difficult and important than ever. And yet, at the same time, superintendents responsible for these critical agreements are leading the process while admittedly lacking any form of instruction or training in the process. An implication that follows from this finding is that administrative training programs, whether part of a university or through professional organizations, need to enhance training opportunities for this critical component of the superintendency.

An additional contribution of this study lies in the finding relative to superintendents and their preference for open and honest negotiation tactics. This study identified a strong preference among superintendents to operate transparently within the

bargaining process. Participants regularly noted that highly effective bargaining is often the product of a complete lack of gamesmanship and is characterized by sharing financial and other data from which decisions are derived and of fostering a bargaining environment of shared understanding. As superintendents navigate difficult bargaining components, such as the rising cost of health care and proposals to reduce of student contact time, these professionals emphasize the effectiveness of sharing any information utilized by the Board of Education in developing bargaining philosophies or positions. The concept offered by participating superintendents in this study emphasizes a lack of game-like bargaining banter in favor of shared knowledge and collective problem-solving. This conclusion offers a new perspective to superintendents, Boards of Education, and union leadership who intend to bargain future contracts. Effective bargaining, as a conclusion of this study, is characterized by open communication, sharing of all pertinent data and an effort to compromise in order to solve common issues.

Recommendations for Future Research

There remain several intriguing opportunities for further research relative to collective bargaining in public schools. Future research may consider the perspective of teacher union leadership as they experience the collective bargaining process. Findings for such a study may provide valuable insight as they are compared and contrasted to the collective bargaining experiences of superintendents. For example, a study of interest would include an examination of emergent themes in this study (preference for informal bargaining, importance of openness and honesty) to determine their reciprocity, or lack thereof, with respect to union leadership perspectives. Of interest would be a

determination of whether or not these thematic areas of preference are held more or less strongly on the management side of bargaining than they are among union leadership and membership. Further exploration may also consider how union personnel define informal bargaining as well as openness and honesty in comparison to superintendents.

Future studies should also consider employing a mixed-method design and a larger sample size to increase the precision of estimates.

This study examined the differences in collective bargaining perspectives between superintendents based on levels of experience. An alternate variable that may be worthy of future research would include an examination regarding divergent perspectives offered by superintendents based on their gender or race differences.

Further exploration might also include an examination of the differences in the negotiation process where superintendents are highly trained, versus those superintendents that have little or no training. The manifestation of variant superintendent training levels at the bargaining table would allow for an interesting study relative to collective bargaining strategies employed, results achieved, and the implication of those results upon the teaching and learning process. Such a study would provide further implications with respect to the institutions and organizations that are responsible for certifying superintendents and providing ongoing professional development for superintendents in the areas of leadership and collective bargaining. Such a study could provide valuable information regarding what specific types of formalized training may be needed to improve the effectiveness of superintendents within the collective bargaining process.

Furthermore, it is recommended that further research studies consider the current curriculum requirements of Michigan universities' preparation programs for school superintendents to determine where the collective bargaining process is introduced and how the existing university program can be modified to address this apparent void.

It is also recommended that a study be conducted to determine the role that professional organizations are providing superintendents in support of the collective bargaining process. In this study, the majority of superintendents indicated that they have received little, if any, training. A study of professional organizations and professional leadership programs should provide information about the gaps in these areas and where future development efforts can help to support the learning and experience of superintendents.

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Appendix A

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board Letter of Approval

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY



Human Subjects Institutional Review Board

Date: January 28, 2008

To: Walter Burt, Principal Investigator
Kyle Mayer, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Amy Naugle", written over the printed name.

Re: HSIRB Project Number: 08-01-03

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled "Collective Bargaining in Public Schools: Superintendents' Perspective" has been **approved** under the **expedited** category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may **only** conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: January 28, 2009

Walwood Hall, Kalamazoo, MI 49008-5456
PHONE: (269) 387-8293 FAX: (269) 387-8276

Appendix B
Dissertation HSIRB Application

Dissertation HSIRB Application

12/18/2007

Collective Bargaining in Public Schools: Superintendents' Perspective

Principal Investigator/Faculty Advisor: Dr. Walter Burt

Co-Principal Student Investigator: Kyle W. Mayer

ABSTRACT

This phenomenological inquiry focuses on the need of school superintendents to succeed in the collective bargaining process. Success, as it relates to collective bargaining, may be impossible to define as it will be different for every school district. However defined, success in collective bargaining must encompass a signed agreement which indicates satisfactory compensation to district employees while allowing a district to remain academically fit as well as financially solvent.

The researcher for this study is a second year superintendent in Michigan and while conducting the study is simultaneously engaged in the collective bargaining process. Therefore, the researcher is intrinsically interested in gaining knowledge about the collective bargaining process. The motivation for this study is to explore the lived experiences of modern day superintendents within the collective bargaining process. The focus is on superintendents' recollections and experiences within the collective bargaining process. This approach facilitates the researcher in uncovering and exploring the challenges presented by collective bargaining among superintendents and the various strategies that they employ throughout the process.

PURPOSE/BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The primary purpose of this study will be to explore how selected superintendents are experiencing the collective bargaining process. Exploration will include an

examination of the various roles that selected superintendents have played in the collective bargaining process.

Furthermore, exploration will include thematic areas of greatest challenges facing superintendents in recent collective bargaining negotiations. Particular emphasis will be given to the rising cost of health care benefits.

Finally, this study will synthesize and develop, through analysis of responses given by the sample group of superintendents, emerging themes that indicate the range of strategies employed by superintendents within the collective bargaining process.

SUBJECT RECRUITMENT

The potential subjects chosen for this study will be a purposeful criterion sample from a convenience pool. Twenty-six Mid-Western school superintendents in relatively small rural and suburban school districts will serve as subjects for this research. The superintendents in this sample currently oversee school districts that range in size from approximately eight hundred students to over five thousand students.

Subsequently, those superintendents identified as possible participants will be invited to take part in the study through the use of an email correspondence (Appendix C). The text of the email invitation will explain that the researcher (Kyle Mayer) is in the process of completing a doctoral dissertation through Western Michigan University. The focus of the study will be explained as well as the need to perform individual and focus group interviews. A response to this email will be requested in order to determine whether or not each potential subject may be willing to participate. The prospective sample superintendents will be assured that their identities will be protected through the

use of pseudonyms throughout the course of this study. The sample superintendents will be asked to respond to the e-mail invitation within one week. Also, attached to the email invitation, the potential subjects will find a formal invitation to participate, sample interview questions and a consent document. The potential candidates will be informed that these attachments are for their information only and hardcopies of these documents will be provided at the time of the interviews, should they choose to participate.

INFORMED CONSENT PROCESS

Individuals who indicate that they are willing to take part in the study will receive follow-up email messages specifying the date, time and location for their interview. Immediately preceding each individual and focus group interview, all potential participants will be provided with an additional copy of the informed consent document for this study and ample time to read and review the document. The researcher will collect the signed consent documents from the willing participants prior to initiating any interview.

RESEARCH PROCEDURE

The researcher will utilize a qualitative approach to examine the experiences of twenty-six superintendents who play various roles and have various experiences within the collective bargaining process. The researcher will apply qualitative analyses of the experiences shared by the various superintendents to develop emerging themes which indicate a range of strategies employed by superintendents as they engage in the collective bargaining process, as well as carrying out those responsibilities needed to negotiate a successful agreement in their respective school districts. Emergent thematic responses

may indicate issues such as health care costs, student achievement issues, broader economical factors, etc. Each of these themes will be fully developed by the researcher and explored under the lens of current literature and researcher shedding light on these emergent themes.

Data will be collected through the utilization of in-depth personal interviews as well as focus group interviews. Participants of the individual interviews will not take part in the focus group interviews. Consent for all participants will occur individually.

Data for this study will be collected between January, 2008 and April, 2008. This will include a minimum of two focus group interviews (eight participants in each focus group) in addition to ten in-depth personal interviews. As Creswell (2003) suggests, the data collection process may change from the original blueprint as the study progresses. The nature of qualitative research dictates that the researcher adapt data collection methods dependent on emergent understanding and the spectrum of work required in order to build grounded theory.

The interview strategies utilized in this study will involve unstructured and generally open-ended techniques. Individual interviews will be conducted in advance of focus group interviews. Individual interviews will be audio recorded, while focus group interviews will not. The researcher anticipates thematic areas of response may develop during the individual interviews. Possible themes which emerge within the individual interview process, such as issues with State funding of public schools, will subsequently be used as focus group interview prompts. The number of prompts planned by the researcher (for all interviews) will be relatively few in number, following a design which will allow respondent freedom to expand answers fully. The interviewer will provide a

description of the study, an explanation of the research questions under examination, and key probes designed to address the research questions.

Individual interviews will be conducted with ten practicing superintendents. Individual interviews will take place prior to focus group interviews and will be conducted within the office of the interviewee. Dates and times of individual interviews will be selected based on the convenience of the interviewee. Five of the individually-interviewed superintendents will be highly experienced, in that they have negotiated more than three contracts; five are less-experienced in that they have negotiated less than three contracts. The separation of interviewees based on experience level enables the researcher to analyze similarities and differences among the two groups.

Similarly, the first focus group will consist of eight veteran superintendents who have participated in the collective bargaining process for a minimum of three successfully negotiated contracts. The second focus group will consist of eight less-experienced superintendents who have participated in the collective bargaining process for less than three successfully negotiated contracts. Focus group interviews will be conducted with the intention of gaining understanding regarding the deepest levels of knowledge and experiences of selected superintendents and to provide ample opportunity for the superintendents to expand fully on their experiences. In order to achieve this goal, the three most prevailing themes which have emerged from the individual interviews will be used as prompts for discussion among the focus group participants. The dates and times of focus group interviews will be determined based on the convenience of the participants. The researcher anticipates that focus group interviews will be most conveniently scheduled at a centrally located Regional Education Service District facility.

METHODOLOGY

In selecting the appropriate research design for this study, careful consideration was given by the researcher regarding the most effective approach in addressing the research questions. Quantitative and qualitative studies both share the same goal of identifying clear and consistent patterns of phenomena by a systematic process (Marshall & Rossman, 1992). In this particular case, the researcher is seeking to know more about how superintendents are experiencing the collective bargaining process.

This study is designed to examine the lived experiences of selected superintendents in rural and small suburban school districts located in the Mid-West. To investigate these experiences, a phenomenological design has been developed that entails the collection of data from superintendents through personal interviews and focus groups meetings. With this type of approach, the researcher:

“identifies the “essence” of human experiences concerning a phenomenon, as described by participants in a study. Understanding the “lived experiences” marks phenomenology as a philosophy as well as a method, and the procedure involves studying a small number of subjects through extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationships of meaning. (Moustakas in Creswell, 2003, p.15).

The researcher has chosen focus group and in-depth personal interviews as the methodology most useful in reaching the deepest level of understanding possible. This form of qualitative study allows the interviewee to lead the researcher in directions that may have been originally unexpected. In this manner, the potential for greater understanding is not restricted by the researcher, or any quantitative tool that may have been utilized.

According to Charles & Mertler (2002), any research topic has to satisfy the “principal of importance” (p. 17). A qualitative researcher must ask themselves whether or not the research will contribute to human knowledge in a meaningful way. In this study, the principal of importance is satisfied in several ways. First, and foremost, this study will provide detailed insights into the various roles that superintendents play within the collective bargaining process. This study further contributes to the general body of knowledge in that it offers insights regarding strategies that superintendents feel are purposeful in the modern day collective bargaining process.

In light of No Child Left Behind, and relatively new accountability measures that public schools are now monitored by, a high degree of value is placed in learning more about the collective bargaining process. This study will examine the thinking, strategies, interactions, and impact of experiences within the collective bargaining process for school district superintendents who bear responsibility for planning, conducting, and actively participating in that process. This study was organized in a fashion that allows a comparison of values, strategies and tactics used at the collective bargaining table by experienced superintendents in comparison to less experienced superintendents. The value in this comparison is found in the distinctions made by the respective groups, the methods utilized, and the overall approaches that the two groups utilize within the collective bargaining process.

The investigator will utilize personal and focus group interviews of selected superintendents as the primary mode for collecting data in this research study. All interviews will be scheduled at the convenience of the identified respondents. Individual interviews will be conducted in the office of the selected superintendent, while focus

group interviews will most likely be conducted in a Service Agency located in a Mid-Western community. In all interviews, the researcher will seek to ensure that a quiet and comfortable location is provided and that the participants' anonymity will be maintained at all times. Following each individual interview, the audio recording will be transcribed by the researcher. Focus group participants will transcribe their own data in the process of fostering a lively group discussion. Each focus group will be presented with three large pieces of chart paper at the outset of their group interview. Written at the top of each of these three pieces of chart paper will be one of the three most prevalent themes that emerged as a result of the individual interview responses. Focus group participants will be asked to discuss each theme individually. A recorder will be chosen from the focus group to record in writing the thoughts shared by fellow group members in relation to each thematic area of focus. At the conclusion of the focus group discussions, these chart-paper transcriptions will be collected and stored by the researcher in a secure location.

The purpose of using focus groups in this study will be to observe the interaction among participants (Hatch, 2002). Therefore, grouping experienced superintendents separately from those with less experience will allow the two groups to share common understandings and foster a richer interview session in that ideas will be shared and expanded on among interviewees. The researcher will utilize the focus group environment to create conversations that will allow the participants to share thoughts with one another and to explore the topic in great depth (Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996). Furthermore, the researcher will utilize the active interview process described by Holstein and Gubrium (1995) which promotes an interview protocol which allows the respondent to be more reflective and analytical in their responses.

For the purposes of this phenomenological study, the researcher will follow an outline of data analysis proposed by Creswell (2003), which includes: analysis of interview transcripts for significant statements, coding statements into theme categories and finally, analysis and interpretation of emerging themes. Comparisons will be drawn between the focus groups and the individuals in order to add to the reliability of the research results. The researcher will also identify themes that emerge among the divergent groupings of superintendents with more experience in collective bargaining versus those with less experience.

Each theme group will be labeled under a term selected by the researcher that generalizes meaning that is developing from the particular group. Emergent themes will display multiple perspectives from study participants and will be supported by diverse quotations and specific evidence as gained through the interview process. The researcher expects that significant overlap and connectedness will present among emergent theme groups. These connections will be fully explored and discussed by the researcher.

Findings will be validated through a member checking process (Creswell, 2003). Initial results and reporting of the transcribed interviews will be presented to each interviewee to determine whether or not participants feel that the interpretation of the research is consistent with the intended meaning.

The researcher anticipates that the data analysis steps described above will not be neatly confined or able to be followed in a step by step fashion. The data analysis in this study involves theme categories that will be developed on multiple levels as the constructivist approach unfolds. This type of involvement in the data analysis portion of a qualitative study is not uncommon. Locke (2000) states that, "Qualitative studies are

never quick and rarely are completed within the projected timelines. The analysis of qualitative data demands a sustained level of creative thought rarely required of the investigator once data are collected in a quantitative study” (p. 115). Therefore, precise timelines for this study may be difficult to predict. However, the researcher intends to complete all phases of this study no later than December, 2008.

Finally, based on the findings of the researcher through the interview analysis, the researcher will pose questions for further study. At the conclusion of this study, all data will be maintained and stored for a period of five years by the principal investigator

RISKS AND COSTS TO AND PROTECTIONS FOR SUBJECTS

Physical, psychological, social and economic risk factors related to this study are minimal. The only perceived risk of any significance is the potential for disclosure of sensitive information. Furthermore, any disclosure of sensitive information related to collective bargaining could potentially be damaging in terms of the participants’ positions politically or economically within their District. However, the use of pseudonyms and strict adherence to confidentiality by the researcher will minimize the possibility that a participant may be identified in the course of this study. Protections for this potential risk will include signed consent by all participants indicating agreement that any discussions conducted within this study shall remain confidential.

Additionally, the consent document will require a signed agreement of all participants indicating that the participant will not discuss comments made within the focus group with any outside entity.

A potential cost associated with this study is the travel time and expenses to participants participating in focus groups. Focus group interviews will be scheduled in a central location after interviewees have been identified. Therefore, every effort will be made on the part of the researcher to minimize travel costs for the sample participants. In addition, the researcher will attempt to minimize the time commitment for participants in this study through careful organization and prompt attention to participant concerns.

BENEFITS OF RESEARCH

Due to a focus on present-day school budget and accountability issues, this study may add to the existing literature about the role of superintendents as they engage in the negotiations process. The intent of this study is to learn more about the challenges facing superintendents in the current era of collective bargaining. In addition, this study may provide understanding regarding emerging themes pertaining to strategies that superintendents employ in reaching an agreement that is satisfactory to staff as well as the district. In short, the study of the lived experiences among a group of superintendents with a range of roles and responsibilities related to collective bargaining may produce important themes that can provide guidance for other superintendents facing the same challenges.

CONFIDENTIALITY OF DATA

Following the guidelines of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) of Western Michigan University, an invitation to participate in this study will be sent to the twenty-six superintendents through the use of an e-mail correspondence. Interview questions to be utilized in the study will be given to the sample superintendents

as part of the invitation to participate. Prospective participants will be given the opportunity to voluntarily take part in the study. Participants will be informed of their right to not respond to any questions, or group discussion, and if need be, they can voluntarily withdraw from the interview, or focus group, at any point in time during the data collection process. The invitation communiqué will contain a brief description of the study along with an invitation to participate and assurance that their responses will be kept anonymous. The sample superintendents will be assured that their identities will be protected through the use of pseudonyms throughout the course of this study. While the study is in progress, all written and audiotaped data will be kept in the sole possession of the student investigator, Mr. Kyle Mayer. At no time will data for this study be left unattended except for when under lock and key in the home of the student investigator, Mr. Kyle Mayer. Furthermore, during transport all data will be stored in a lockable briefcase owned by the student researcher. Upon completion of the study, all data will be placed under lock and key in the Office of the Principal Investigator, Dr. Walter Burt and will be retained for a minimum of three years.

Appendix C

Interview Outline for Personal Interviews

Interview Questions for Personal Interviews

Background Information

- a. Explanation of research and assurance of protection and identification as contained in proposal
- b. Demographics: Years as superintendent, enrollment in district, number of contracts negotiated

Major Question: Can you please describe for me your experiences as a superintendent conducting or participating in collective bargaining?

Probe A: Can you give me more examples of how you have dealt with issues related to employee benefit costs?

Probe B: Can you give me more examples of how you have dealt with issues related to the Board of Education's role in collective bargaining?

Probe C: Can you give me more examples of how you have dealt with issues related to the current economy in the State of Michigan?

Probe D: Can you give me more examples of how you have dealt with issues related to Health Care Costs for employees?

Probe E: Can you give me more examples of how you have dealt with issues related to student achievement?

Probe F: Can you give me more examples of how you have dealt with issues related to your own training and preparation for leading this process?

Probe G: Can you give me more examples of bargaining strategies that have been particularly successful?

Probe H: Can you give me more examples of bargaining strategies that have not been particularly successful?

Probe I: Can you give me more examples of how you may intend to bargain differently in the future than you may have in the past?

Appendix D

Interview Outline for Focus Groups

Background Information

- c. Explanation of research and assurance of protection and identification as contained in proposal
- d. Demographics: Years as superintendent, enrollment in district, number of contracts negotiated

Major Question: I am going to ask you all to think about your experiences within the collective bargaining process. In doing so, I am going to place four key themes related to collective bargaining on the chart paper which is displayed at the front of this room. These four themes have emerged within my research and through ten previously conducted individual interviews with various superintendents around the State.

Probe A: Can this focus group talk about or give examples of how you have experienced issues related to theme # 1?

Probe B: Can this focus group talk about or give examples of how you have experienced issues related to theme # 2?

Probe C: Can this focus group talk about or give examples of how you have experienced issues related to theme # 3?

Probe D: Can this focus group talk about or give examples of how you have experienced issues related to theme # 4?

Probe E: Can you give examples of bargaining strategies that have been particularly successful? Please select a person from your group to serve as a recorder to write your responses on the chart paper provided.

Probe F: Can you give examples of bargaining strategies that have not been particularly successful? Please select a person from your group to serve as a recorder to write your responses on the chart paper provided.

Appendix E

Initial Email Letter to Prospective Sample Superintendents

Date

Dear Fellow Superintendent:

In the process of completing my doctoral dissertation through Western Michigan University, I need to perform several interviews with various superintendents. The focus of my study is the superintendents' perspective regarding collective bargaining.

Through this email correspondence, I am asking if you may be willing to participate in this study and therefore have your thoughts/ideas included anonymously within this study. I anticipate your time commitment, should you choose to participate, will be no greater than two hours in duration.

Attached, please find a formal invitation to participate, consent document and sample interview questions. These are for your information only and may provide you with more information when making a decision about participation. Please respond to this message with an informal indication regarding whether or not you would be willing to participate in this study. If you indicate that you are willing, I will follow up with you regarding a time and place to meet for an interview. I would greatly appreciate a response within one week, if possible.

Thank you very much,

Kyle Mayer

Appendix F

Formal Invitation to Participate

Western Michigan University
Educational Leadership Graduate Program

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Collective Bargaining in Public Schools: Superintendents' Perspective

You are asked to voluntarily participate in a research study conducted by Dr. Walter Burt, faculty advisor, and Kyle W. Mayer, doctoral student, from the Educational Leadership graduate program at Western Michigan University. The results of this study will contribute to the completion of Kyle Mayer's doctoral dissertation.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY: We are asking you to voluntarily participate in this research study because we are attempting to learn more about the superintendent's role in the collective bargaining process. In a climate of increasing expenditures and scarce revenues, the purpose of this study will be to determine how superintendents are experiencing the collective bargaining process. Therefore, the purposes of this study will be:

1. To explore how selected superintendents are experiencing the collective bargaining process. Exploration will include an examination of the various roles that the selected superintendents have played in the collective bargaining process.
2. To explore thematic areas of greatest challenges facing superintendents in recent collective bargaining negotiations. Particular emphasis will be given to the rising cost of health care benefits.
3. To synthesize and develop, through analysis of responses given by the sample group of superintendents, emerging themes that indicate the range of strategies employed by superintendents within the collective bargaining process.

PROCEDURES: Should you volunteer to participate as a member of the pilot group for this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview that will be designed to elicit your personal experiences in regards to the collective bargaining process. You may be interviewed individually, or within focus groups comprised of other superintendents. Your time commitment for this study will be no greater than two hours in length.

Determinations regarding which participants will take part in individual interviews, and which participants will take part in focus group interviews will be made after the researcher identifies willing participants through email correspondence. This determination will be made based up the convenience of the participants. Focus group meetings may prove to be more difficult to coordinate. Therefore, regional proximity will be used to determine the focus group participants. All participants will be informed of their interview format via email prior to their actual participation. No participant will be asked to take part in both an individual and a focus group interview. No participant will be forced to take part in an interview format with which they feel uncomfortable.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS: Risks and discomforts within this study are minimal. Potential discomforts include the time required for participants to take part in the study including travel and interview time. In addition, participants may experience some discomfort in discussing their thoughts relating to the subject matter in the presence of fellow focus group members, or the researcher. All available precautions will be taken by the researcher to foster a discussion forum free from embarrassment or discomfort for any group member. Of course, a participant can withdraw from the study at any time.

Finally, a potential risk of this study includes the possibility of a participant's comments or statements being identifiable to an outside viewer. The researcher will take all necessary precautions in order to prevent this occurrence. All focus group members will sign an agreement of confidentiality. Furthermore, audio recordings and written data will be securely stored under lock and key by the researcher. Names and or events that may indicate a specific person, or school district, will be properly disguised by the researcher through the use of pseudonyms.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS: The data collected in this study will be analyzed qualitatively and will provide potential benefits to subjects participating in the study by identifying practices and experiences that can enhance the superintendent's role in the collective bargaining process.

COMPENSATION: No payment will be awarded for participation in interviews for this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Any information gathered throughout the course of this study will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission as required by law. In the event that results of this research are published or discussed in conferences or public forum, no identification will be included that would reveal any particular individual's identity. Data gathered from the interview sessions will be presented in a manner (using pseudonyms) that does not reflect or identify any specific individual or organization involved with this study. Data compiled from interviews will be maintained solely in the personal possession of the researcher, Kyle W. Mayer, WMU doctoral student, and interview transcripts will be destroyed following analyses and the doctoral defense.

IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS: Should you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact the principal investigator: Dr. Walter Burt, Western Michigan University, 3422 Sangren Hall Kalamazoo, MI 49008, email: walter.burt@wmich.edu, telephone: (269) 387-1821.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS: Potential candidates who have an interest in participating in this study should complete the attached "Consent Document." You may choose to print and sign the attached Consent Document and bring it to your interview (to be scheduled via email correspondence.) The researcher will also provide additional copies of the Consent Document at the time of your interview.

Candidates who do not wish to take part in this study may simply not respond, or may notify Kyle Mayer via email or telephone of their decision not to participate.

Appendix G
Consent Document

Consent Document

Western Michigan University
Department of : Teaching, Learning & Leadership
Principal Investigator: Dr. Walter Burt
Student Investigator: Kyle Mayer

You have been invited to participate in a research project entitled *Collective Bargaining in Public Schools: Superintendents' Perspective*. The study is being conducted by Kyle Mayer, a doctoral student in Educational leadership doctoral program at Western Michigan University, under the supervision of Dr. Walter Burt, his dissertation chair. This study will serve to fulfill Kyle Mayer's dissertation requirement.

The purpose of the research is to understand the experiences of selected Public School Superintendents as it relates to collective bargaining, especially in light of the current economic climate in Michigan, as well as increased accountability measures under No Child Left Behind.

You will be asked to attend an interview session, which will last for about ninety minutes. You may be asked to interview individually with the researcher, or within a small focus group consisting of seven other superintendents. Individual interviews will take place in the office of the interviewee, while focus group interviews will be arranged for at a centrally located site such as the nearest Regional Education Service District. Additionally, you may be asked to return for a follow-up interview at the request of the researcher. Follow-up interviews will not exceed thirty minutes in length.

Focus group and individual interviews will entail understanding your viewpoints about collective bargaining. Individual interviews will be audio taped, while focus group interviews will not. Audio recording will be utilized to ensure the accuracy of the information. Transcripts of all recorded individual interviews will be produced. However, you may request the interviewer to turn off the audio recorder at any time during the interview (should you participate in an individual interview). Details of all interviews will be kept confidential as fictitious names will be used and your position/status and employment will be described generically. The findings of this study will be disseminated

through the process of public dissertation, but no real-life identities will be given. By signing this document, you allow the audio taping of the interview (should you be selected to participate in an individual interview).

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS: Risks and discomforts within this study are minimal. Potential discomforts include the time required for participants to take part in the study including travel and interview time. In addition, participants may experience some discomfort in discussing their thoughts relating to the subject matter in the presence of fellow focus group members, or the researcher. All available precautions will be taken by the researcher to foster a discussion forum free from embarrassment or discomfort for any group member. Of course, a participant can withdraw from the study at any time.

A potential cost associated with this study is the travel expenses to participants participating in focus groups. Focus group interviews will be scheduled in a central location after interviewees have been identified. Therefore, every effort will be made on the part of the researcher to minimize travel costs for the sample participants.

Finally, a potential risk of this study includes the possibility of a participant's comments or statements being identifiable to an outside viewer. The researcher will take all necessary precautions in order to prevent this occurrence. All focus group members will sign an agreement of confidentiality. Furthermore, audio recordings and written data will be securely stored under lock and key by the researcher. Names and or events that may indicate a specific person, or school district, will be properly disguised by the researcher through the use of pseudonyms.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS: The data collected in this study will be analyzed qualitatively and may provide potential benefits to subjects participating in the study by identifying practices and experiences that can enhance the superintendent's role in the collective bargaining process.

The following information is being provided to help you decide whether you wish to participate in the study. You may refuse to participate or quit at any time during the

study without any repercussions. If you do choose to participate in the study, you may refrain from addressing any particular question you do not wish to answer. If you have any questions and concerns about this study, you may contact either Kyle Mayer at 989-620-1404, or via email kyle@bearn.net, or Dr. Walter Burt at walter.burt@wmich.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (269-387-8293) or the Vice President for Research (269-387-8298) if questions or problems arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

My signature below indicates that I have read and/or had explained to you the purpose and requirements of the study and that I agree to participate.

Signature Date

Consent obtained by: _____
Initials of Researcher Date

For Focus Group Participants Only:

My signature below indicates that I agree not to discuss outside of this focus group any comments made by the other participants.

Signature Date

Consent obtained by: _____
Initials of Researcher Date

Appendix H
Interview Follow-Up Document

LETTER TO SUPERINTENDENT INTERVIEWEES

(DATE)

(Name)
Superintendent
(Address)

Dear (Name):

Thank you again for participating in my dissertation research, "The Superintendent's Role in Collective Bargaining." I have completed the first phase of my research with your help. I have also written several drafts of Chapters 4 and 5.

To summarize the information, comments and responses gathered during the interview, I have a few follow-up questions for clarification purposes. As previously indicated in the consent document, which you signed or verbally granted your consent to signify your willingness to participate in the study, please note that you may still withdraw from the study at any time.

If you are willing to participate in this follow-up session, let me know the time frame that is convenient for you to enable me contact you.

Thank you again for your time. As soon as the summary of your interview is completed, I will send it to you for review to ensure that it represents your responses during the interview. Please feel free to contact me at any time to ask questions, clarify issues, or for any concern regarding the study. I can be reached at (989) 620-1404 or via email at mayerkyl@yahoo.com. You may also contact Dr. Walter Burt at walter.burt@wmich.edu, or telephone: (269) 387-1821.

Sincerely,

Kyle W. Mayer