Students with Disabilities and English Language Learners: The Role of the Rural Superintendent in Cultivating High Achievement

By

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to determine how superintendents cultivate high achievement of English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities (SwD). The literature identifies various actions superintendents take to create high-achieving districts. There is a gap in the literature that relates to how district leaders create the change needed to have a positive impact on ELLs and SwD. Given this gap, this study seeks to address the following research question: In rural districts that have been successful in terms of high achievement for all students, what actions do superintendents take to cultivate high achievement for both English language learners and students with disabilities? To address this research question, case studies of two districts will be framed by conceptions of social justice leadership and leadership for change. The study is significant because it provides important insights on rural superintendent leadership as it relates specifically to high achievement of English language learners and students with disabilities.

Chapter 1

District Leadership for English Language Learners and Students with Disabilities

As an educator for 22 years, I have witnessed teachers who integrate and have success with students with disabilities (SwD) and English language learners (ELLs) in their classroom and teachers who are fearful about meeting the needs of children with disabilities and English language learners. The solution for many teachers who do not feel that they can be successful with SwD and ELLs is to ask to have the child removed from classroom instruction either through a pullout program or through the help of an assistant who is not as qualified as the classroom teacher. This is not often in the best interest of the child. Many of these children spend a large portion of their day in pullout programs or receive separate specialized instruction, which results in a disconnected curriculum and school day (Capper & Frattura, 2007). These separate programs have not had the desired results of high achievement for these students. In fact, separate or basic programming for students based on ability grouping rarely creates a situation where students can catch up in the curriculum (Capper & Frattura, 2007). ELLs and SwD tend to be put in lower ability groups based on their language needs and ability label. These separate programs tend to have lower-quality instruction, creating an even larger gap between regular education students and those educated in separate classes (Gamoran, 2004).

In my experience, parents many times blindly follow the recommendation of the teacher to remove their child from the classroom because they are frustrated with the lack of achievement of their child and they do not know how to best advocate for them. Sometimes parents are the ones who insist that their child be taken out of the classroom for supplemental instruction, because they think that it is best for their child.

My personal experience with a child with a learning disability gives me the perspective of a parent as well as the perspective of an administrator. The frustration and feelings of helplessness as a parent led me to want to make a difference for children as a leader in a district.

As a parent, I experienced having my son pulled out of the classroom for his reading difficulties in first, second, and third grades. The teachers worked to convince me that it was the only way he would catch up. He seemed to get more and more behind, had self-esteem issues from being taken out of the classroom, and started to think he was not as smart as the other children. The pullout was not helping, and we were both getting frustrated. Right or wrong, I refused any additional pullout for my son. I continued to work with his classroom teachers to try to get his needs met in the classroom, albeit with a lot of anguish. Throughout his elementary and secondary schooling, he had some teachers who believed they could teach him, and he flourished in those classrooms. He also had classrooms where he felt defeated. Most of the teachers who had no success with him tried to convince me that he would be better off in a pullout program. He would become frustrated and angry in those classrooms. The only noticeable indicator of whether he would do well was if he had a teacher who believed in him and who believed that he or she could teach him. The cumulative effect of the years of missed learning opportunities resulted in it being a struggle to get him to go to school and in him feeling frustrated and wanting to give up. As a parent, I could see what a creative problem solver he was and how bright he was, but because his disability was related to reading, many of his teachers could not see through his struggle to his intelligence. Slowly, he did not believe in himself anymore—it was like his desire to learn was taken from him, and it tore me apart to see him give up. He went from hopefulness, to frustration, to anger, to defensiveness, to

hopelessness. I felt like a doctor whose child had incurable cancer. I could not cure the problem even though it was my profession. My son's struggle developed into the passion behind what I do every day.

As a district-level administrator, I wonder what the vision is for children like my son who have the right to succeed in their educational experience but hit brick wall after brick wall. Many times there is an assumption on the part of some teachers of a deficit in the child. Unfortunately, dealing with student failure by blaming the student has been a common approach for public schools (Frattura & Capper, 2006; Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001; Valencia, 1997). Instead of wondering what makes the child unable to learn, I am convinced that we should be asking what makes us unable to teach them, and what kind of leadership would create the environment for that to happen (Scheurich, 2003; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001; Sramek, 2007). I care about what high-achieving districts do, but my specific interest in achievement is in the kinds of influence the superintendent has on students who are disadvantaged in the school system because they have disabilities or do not speak English as their first language. This study will focus specifically on rural schools and only the populations of ELLs and SwD because these are growing populations in many rural school districts (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2010). Many times rural districts do not have the same resources as urban districts (Capper, 1989; Hooper, Pankake, & Schroth, 1997; Howley, Woodrum, Burgess, & Rhodes, 2009), such as full-time personnel solely in charge of ELL students or access to programs such as bilingual education. Rural districts that are showing gains in serving ELLs and SwD will provide a rich context from which to learn more about superintendents' actions that help produce more positive outcomes for these students.

Statement of the Problem

It has been widely acknowledged that we are not successfully teaching all children (Barron & Sanchez, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Rorrer, 2006; Scheurich, Skrla, & Johnson, 2000). Nearly four decades after the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 mandated a free appropriate public education for all children with disabilities, ensured due process rights, and mandated individual education plans and education in the least restrictive environment, we still are not teaching special education children well enough to close the achievement gap for them. Much of the time we still use the approach of addressing the problem of student achievement after students have failed. According to Frattura and Capper (2006), special programs are like the "ambulance at the bottom of the cliff" (p. 358). Many times students are placed in them *after* they fail academically, socially, or behaviorally. The more proactive response with respect to student learning in the schools would be to *prevent* student failure by addressing the needs of the student before getting to the edge of the cliff.

The signing on January 8, 2002, by President Bush of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) into law, while controversial in many ways, has made districts closely examine the achievement of all children. In particular, NCLB has forced districts and administrators to disaggregate achievement data, and district leaders are now aware of the difference in achievement of White middle- and upper-class children and students of color, speakers of languages other than English, students with a disability, and children of poverty. As a nation, we are not doing well in addressing these gaps (Barron & Sanchez, 2007).

Gloria Ladson-Billings (2006) calls this gap the "education debt." She compares the education debt to the national debt. Closing the gap with the nation's current children would be a start, but even that would not be enough. Closing the achievement gap only with the students

in the current system would be comparable to balancing the budget but not touching the trillions of dollars of debt and accumulating interest. By comparing the educational system to the national debt, Ladson-Billings gives the achievement gap an added urgency. We know the gap exists, but now we must do something to address it. Reyes and Rorrer (2001), in looking at policy for ELLs, find that minority students experience significant failure in public schools both in graduation rate and on standardized testing. In addition, Capper (1989) found that rural school districts were ill-equipped to deal with the challenges of growing diverse populations and students with disabilities.

The goal of NCLB was to close the achievement gap for traditionally marginalized students. "'This law finally puts muscle behind the attempt to close that gap,' said New York City Schools Chancellor Joel Klein. 'We can no longer mask the deficiencies of some students with outsized gains by others'" (U.S. Department of Education, 2007, p. 1). There is evidence that some districts have begun to close the gap (Chenowith, Theokas, & Harvard University, 2007; Rorrer & Skrla, 2005; Zavadsky & Harvard University, 2009). Leadership that closes the achievement gap needs to be replicated in other districts in order to produce high academic achievement for all children in all districts.

More research needs to be completed on how a district leader makes the necessary changes to close the achievement gap. Most current research on leadership of districts is based on overall student achievement (Waters & Marzano, 2006). The research on the superintendent effect on student achievement is most commonly known through the work of Waters and Marzano (2006), who completed a meta-analysis of district-level leadership to answer the following two questions: "What is the strength of relationship between leadership at the district level and average student achievement in the district?" and "What specific district-level

leadership responsibilities are related to student academic achievement?" (p. 7). Marzano and Waters defined achievement as "average academic achievement at the district level" (p. 4). However, *average* academic achievement can be high in a district without having high achievement for marginalized populations in that district. The question that remains is what the district leaders who are closing the achievement gap with marginalized populations are doing to get these results. This study will focus on leaders in rural districts who show success with ELLs and SwD. The study will look at the actions the superintendents in those districts take to cultivate high achievement for both of these traditionally marginalized populations. The reasons for choosing these two populations are to narrow the study and to address two populations that are a concern for rural districts (Capper, 1989; Hooper et al., 1997). In addition, the current literature addresses high-achieving school districts and the effect superintendents have on overall student achievement, but the connection of that literature to leadership in rural districts—particularly for students with disabilities and English language learners—is minimal. Sramek's (2007) study of the role of the superintendent in Integrated Comprehensive Services (ICS) (Frattura & Capper, 2006) as it relates to equity and inclusivity is similar in some ways to this study. In her multi-case study of superintendents using ICS, Sramek determined that the role of the superintendent had changed from that of a manager to that of a collaborative leader with a clear mission and vision, instructional leader, and a leader in district accountability and student achievement. She also determined that an important future study would be to determine what qualities superintendents had who led successful change initiatives. This study takes up this recommendation in part. Although this study is similar to Sramek's in its examination of superintendents with successful track records in the area of equity, this study did not use a predetermined method or approach such as ICS for cultivating

achievement. This study contributes to the research base on successful rural districts using educational leadership change theory as part of the conceptual framework. The findings also provide important insights into how significant changes in the achievement gap can happen on a districtwide scale, especially for rural districts.

This study looks at ELLs and SwD; therefore, the social justice lens gave me a way to see whether the components of social justice were fundamental to these students achieving. While social justice is generally more comprehensive by including additional categories of traditionally marginalized students, ELLs and SwD are among the groups of students who are typically determined to be marginalized.

Chapter 2

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

The literature reviewed for this study includes the following strands of research: achievement of ELL students, achievement of students with disabilities, educator beliefs and practices, and the superintendent's role in student achievement. The first three strands document the problem of achievement, which is summarized in the first chapter, and provide important insights into the kinds of skills, practices, and dispositions that are associated with addressing this problem. The fourth strand delves into the research that has already been done to identify the actions of effective superintendents. After reviewing these literature strands and establishing the rationale for the study, I present my research questions and discuss the two conceptual frameworks that guide this inquiry: social justice leadership and leadership for change.

Achievement of ELL Students

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, later to become No Child Left Behind, provided federal funding to improve the education of children with disabilities, among other traditionally marginalized categories of children. Students who are learning to speak English are one of the traditionally marginalized categories of children. Districts in the United States are attempting to serve a growing number of English language learners (Riehl, 2000). Projections suggest that by the year 2020, "only 49% of the school-aged population will be white, 26% of all children will be living in poverty, and 8% will speak a primary language other than English" (Riehl, 2000, p. 56).

The number of ELL students has grown dramatically in the past 20 years (Goldenberg, 2008). In 1990, 1 in 20 public school students in grades kindergarten through 12 was an

English language learner—that is, a student who speaks English either not at all or with enough limitations that he or she cannot fully participate in mainstream English instruction. Today the figure is 1 in 9. Demographers estimate that in 20 years, it might be 1 in 4 (Goldenberg, 2008). The ELL population has more than doubled from 2 million to 5 million since 1990, a period when the overall school population increased by only 20% (Goldenberg, 2008).

On average, ELLs' academic achievement tends to be low (Goldenberg, 2008). On the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress, fourth-grade ELLs scored 36 points below non-ELLs in reading and 25 points below non-ELLs in math (Goldenberg, 2008). The gaps among eighth-graders were even larger—42 points in reading and 37 points in math (Goldenberg, 2008).

In addition to low achievement, Rueda and Windmueller (2006) report that ELL students are "27% more likely than English-proficient students to be placed in special education in elementary grades and almost twice as likely in secondary grades" (p. 101). Students receiving the least language support were the most likely to be placed in special services. According to Artiles and Ortiz (2002), "[English language] learners receiving all of their instruction in English were almost three times as likely to be in special education resource rooms as those receiving some native language support" (p. 21).

The achievement gap for ELL students is evident. According to Frattura and Capper (2006), "Even book-length works whose title suggests a focus on whole school restructuring to serve students do not address the organizational and structural implementation intricacies of serving students in heterogeneous classrooms" (p. 355). This lack of knowledge by teachers and building and district leadership sometimes results in ELL students being taken out of the regular classroom for individualized instruction, and other times ELL students are kept in the

classroom with other students only to deny them access to information because of the language deficit (Frattura & Capper, 2006).

Some studies, however, have looked at general conditions contributing to classroom success for ELLs. Reyes, Scribner, and Scribner (1999) studied schools along the Mexico-U.S. border that were successful with Mexican American students who were English language learners. Their study found that factors contributing to student-centered classroom environments for Mexican American students included:

- teachers who accepted full responsibility for helping students
- teachers who were extremely caring and nurturing to students
- consistent, productive, and intensive collaboration among teachers
- the encouragement of collaborative learning
- student access to a wide variety of learning materials
- utilization of both Spanish and English, as needed, to enhance learning. (p. 6)

The research by Riester and others (2002) looked at high-achieving elementary schools that effectively serve all students and found the following to be important factors: development and acquisition of early literacy skills is a high priority; deficit thinking is not part of the culture; and the over-identification of students as needing special education is avoided. Principals played a significant role by developing a democratic culture and having a "stubborn persistence" about "getting there" and a prescriptive approach to literacy (Goldenberg, 2008; Riester et al., 2002; Scribner & Scribner, 2001).

In additional research, Goldenberg (2008) contends that no specific formula exists for educating regular education students, and it would follow that there is no specific formula for educating ELL students. "What we can do is provide guidelines based on our strongest

research about effective practices for teaching ELLs" (Goldenberg, 2008, p. 8). This study inquires into how and to what extent superintendents help to create the necessary beliefs and conditions in educators to teach ELLs.

Few districts are educating ELL students well (Barron & Sanchez, 2007; Goldenberg, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2006). Some research exists about what principals and teachers do to create an environment of beliefs and practices that lead to high achievement for ELLs (e.g., Theoharis, 2007), but there is a gap in the research about what a superintendent can do to influence achievement for ELLs.

Students with Disabilities

In 1975, President Gerald Ford signed legislation to "ensure educational equity for children with disabilities and special needs. This legislation, now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), was a major milestone in the quest to end the chronic exclusion and mis-education of students with exceptional needs" (Finn, Rotherham, & Hokanson, 2001, p. v). Although education for students with disabilities was legislated, it is common knowledge that early attempts at educating students with special needs was far from perfect; otherwise, there would currently be no achievement gap between regular education and special education students. As an attempt to improve education, on October 2, 2001, President Bush ordered the creation of the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education, and on January 8, 2002, he signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 was another attempt to improve special education. Within all of the revisions, the term *least restrictive environment* has been used to refer to educational placement of students with disabilities. To implement this part of IDEA with integrity, students should be assumed to be regular education students first, with accommodations made in the

classroom before any type of pullout programming is considered (NCES, 2010). Research on inclusion supports the law in that students should be in inclusive environments to the extent possible. Singh (2006) finds that the literature on inclusion indicates:

> The majority of the teachers support inclusion and believe that inclusion benefits students with disabilities and does not harm the non-disabled students. Further, the presence of students with disabilities has no negative impact on the instructional process. Inclusion offers several other benefits such as increased opportunities for social interaction for students with disabilities and facility in accessing the general education curriculum. (p. 2)

Turnbull (2005) supports the least restrictive environment from a different perspective, indicating that too many, or the wrong kinds of, accommodations, such as giving students an easier curriculum and having lower expectations in pullout environments, have created a lack of responsibility by parents and students. Students begin to use their disability as a rationale for accommodations. This makes the students the "true victims," because they are "encouraged to rely upon special accommodations rather than being challenged to achieve at high levels" (p. 324).

Moen (2008) states that inclusion "is not just a matter of physical location, but also social, cultural and academic inclusion, allowing the children to participate based on their abilities" (p. 71). However, students with disabilities "often spend the largest part of their day leaving their classroom to receive special instruction, resulting in a disconnected and fragmented school day" (Frattura & Capper, 2006, p. 356).

Inclusion of special education students in the regular classroom environment is a key to better results. In the United States, despite more than 25 years of state and federal disability

laws, “22% of students with disability labels have failed to complete high school, compared to 9% of students without labels” (Frattura & Capper, 2006, p. 356). Research supports educating SwD in regular classroom environments for increased academic results as well as more positive social outcomes (not to mention that it is the most cost-effective way to educate students) (Frattura & Capper, 2006).

Moen (2008) sums up an empirical study on inclusivity by stating that “there are reasons to believe that the most critical factor for inclusive education is the teacher, and the most important arena for inclusive education is the regular classroom or the regular arena for school activities” (p. 60). While teachers, the law, and research all agree that special education students should be in the least restrictive environment (inclusive whenever possible), questions still remain for most teachers about how to make this work in the classroom. To address this question, Rix, Hall, Nind, Kieron, and Wearmouth (2009) conducted a three-year systematic review of literature to identify the pedagogical approaches that can effectively include students with disabilities in general education. The criteria for the review were that the studies had to have reported outcomes for students with special educational needs in both academic and social inclusion. The review team focused upon “peer-group interactions, the nature of teacher and pupil interactions and whole-class, subject-based pedagogies” (p. 87).

Not surprisingly, one of the key findings of the review of research was that “teachers who see the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs as part of their role are more likely to have effective, high-quality, on-task interactions” (Rix et al., 2009, p. 92). Some of the findings or implications for practice from this study are that teachers need to: recognize that they are ultimately responsible for teaching all children; engage with a community of teachers within or outside of the school who have a shared model of how children learn; develop a

shared philosophy around learning and respecting how everyone in the class learns; recognize that social interaction is how students acquire knowledge; and use a wide range of modalities to teach, including hands-on and opportunities to engage with other students about concepts. This study examines what, if any, influence a superintendent would have on cultivating the practices that lead to achievement of students with disabilities in the classroom. An initial study in this area by Sramek (2007) indicated that superintendents need to have skills in providing instructional leadership, collaborative leadership to principals and other key stakeholders, and data analysis skills with a focus on students in disaggregated populations.

Educator Beliefs and Practices

A teacher's belief that he or she can teach all students has a very powerful influence on his or her effectiveness as a teacher (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). "It is now understood that teachers' efficacy beliefs have a profound effect on the educational process" (Knoblauch & Woolfolk Hoy, 2008, p. 166).

What specifically is teacher efficacy? Protheroe (2008) found in her review of research between 1977 and 2007 that related to what helps a teacher to develop efficacy and how a principal might help to develop efficacy in teachers, certain behaviors were associated with a strong sense of efficacy. Such teachers:

> Tend to exhibit greater levels of planning and organization; are more open to new ideas and are more willing to experiment with new methods to better meet the needs of their students; are more persistent and resilient when things do not go smoothly; are less critical of students when they make errors; and are less inclined to refer a difficult student to special education. (p. 43)

Teacher efficacy can affect a district for the long term. To have an impact on teacher beliefs, a superintendent should determine how teacher efficacy is built. The first years of teaching and the student teaching experience have been shown to have a large impact on teacher efficacy. The development of teacher efficacy gets much of its power from mastery experiences during student teaching and the induction year, making the first years critical for new teachers (Protheroe, 2008, p. 43).

Knoblauch and Woolfolk Hoy (2008) studied the development of efficacy among student teachers. They found that the efficacy of the cooperating teacher, the collective efficacy of the school, and diverse teaching experiences created a stronger efficacy for the student teachers. Student teachers were then better able to feel that they could handle more diverse and challenging experiences and students. Supporting this study, Brady and Woolfson (2008) specifically studied how teacher efficacy supported the teaching of students with special needs. They found that:

> Teachers with a strong sense of efficacy are more willing to modify teaching methods to accommodate student needs. Soodak and Podell (1993) found that regular and special educators with a high sense of teaching efficacy were most likely to be supportive of inclusive placements. Moreover, teachers evidencing high efficacy were found to be more willing to take responsibility for meeting the needs of students with learning difficulties in their own classrooms. (p. 528)

Brady and Woolfson (2008) noted that teacher enthusiasm for inclusive environments increased as the teachers became more removed from the regular education classroom. In other words, the regular classroom teacher, in general, was less enthusiastic about inclusion than a special education teacher. The researchers also found that the teachers with the most

experience working with students with special needs attributed student difficulties to more internal factors such as the school or teaching rather than external factors such as the student or the student's family, which suggests a willingness by the teacher to accept responsibility for student progress. This is an important reminder that, "The way educators frame student failure (i.e., whether student failure is seen as a student or a systems issue) is the pivotal point of all the remaining assumptions and practices in schools" (Frattura & Capper, 2006, p. 358).

Teachers with a higher sense of efficacy were more likely than teachers with a lower sense of efficacy to attribute children's difficulties to external factors (e.g., how the content was taught). This suggests that teachers who feel more competent and have a greater belief in their power to influence students were more willing to take some responsibility for the children's difficulties and were more willing to adapt their teaching methods to suit the needs of included students (Brady & Woolfson, 2008, p. 540).

Moen's (2008) single case study of an inclusive classroom in Norway looked at a more practical aspect of inclusion by studying a teacher who was successful in including special education students in her regular classroom. The teacher incorporated the following practices: student participation in activities that were both firm in expectations yet flexible enough for students to have autonomy; smooth transitions that drew students' interest and persuaded them rather than commanded them; communication that caused the teacher to see and communicate with each child as an individual for reasons of differentiation and understanding of the child and his or her thought processes; and positive, shared experiences for all children. Moen (2008) summarizes these processes as membership, mastery, togetherness, involvement, and learning. He also points out that no child is at any time excluded or segregated from the class, not even when the teacher has an additional adult in the classroom. As the study of this

teacher's methods clearly shows, "being a teacher has both practical and reflective dimensions" (Shulman, 1985, 1998). "In the daily flow of classroom activities these two dimensions are interwoven" (Moen, 2008, p. 71).

The research suggests that, although students learn in unique ways, we do know about common effective practices for ELLs and SwD. Students with disabilities and ELLs achieve better when they are in inclusive environments and with teachers who have a high level of efficacy. Teachers need to show respect for how everyone in the class learns; recognize that social interaction is how students acquire knowledge; and use a wide range of modalities to teach, including hands-on and opportunities to engage with other students about concepts.

Clearly, teacher beliefs and practices have an effect on student learning. The question in this study is what influence does the superintendent have on cultivating those beliefs and practices in rural district contexts that demonstrate success with ELLs and SwD?

Superintendent Role

Literature on the role of the superintendent in high-achieving schools has attempted to answer the questions: What effect, if any, does the superintendent have on student achievement? Is the superintendent part of a "blob" (Waters & Marzano, 2006) of people who work outside of the classroom and soak up resources, or do his or her decisions contribute to student achievement? A meta-analysis of quantitative studies by Waters and Marzano (2006) examined findings from 27 studies that were carried out since 1970 on the influence of school district leaders on student achievement. The meta-analysis involved 2,817 districts and the achievement scores of over 3.4 million students. Waters and Marzano (2006) found that district-level leadership can have an effect if the district-level leader meets certain defined standards. To positively affect student achievement, the superintendent must:

1. Ensure collaborative goal setting
2. Establish nonnegotiable goals for achievement and instruction
3. Create board alignment with and support of district goals
4. Monitor achievement and instruction goals
5. Allocate resources to support the goals for achievement and instruction. (p. 6)

Put simply, the superintendent must have a clear vision and focus and make sure that the other key decision makers and leaders hold the same vision and focus. One key stakeholder in this process is the building principal. Effective superintendents allow autonomy in some defined areas for principals. This autonomy allows them to determine how district goals will be met within their building, but they are expected to follow the district goals for learning and instruction without question.

Michael and Young (2005) established some similar findings when they developed the characteristics of "inspired" schools and meaningful school improvement based on surveys of 29 senior leaders (superintendents and assistant superintendents) from high-performing schools. Eight of these schools were selected for further study to identify the characteristics of inspired schools. Some of the findings include: attention invested in the developmental needs of all members of the school; traditions that nurture belonging; promoting inclusivity; equity; and global citizenship.

The Waters and Marzano (2006) meta-analysis suggests what a superintendent can do to have a high-achieving district; however, without a focus on inclusive environments, a district could have high achievement or increasing achievement while still educating traditionally marginalized students in separate environments and still have the majority of the students in traditionally marginalized groups in the low achievement category. What additional

steps would a superintendent need to take to make the step from leader of a high-achieving district to leader of a high-achieving and inclusive district—attaining high achievement for all groups of students *and* inclusive practices?

According to Scheurich (2003), the most important characteristics of a leader who creates an equitable and excellent school are a strong moral code focused on equity and excellence as the *only* right choice, a deeply held belief that positive growth and improvement in both equity and excellence is truly possible, and the quality of never giving up on working toward equity and excellence.

Hooper, Pankake, and Schroth (1997) studied the concerns of superintendents of small districts (with average daily attendance of fewer than 1,600 students) regarding inclusion of special education children. The study found that superintendents did not perceive themselves as facilitators of inclusion implementation, but rather as playing a significant role in planning and oversight. Although the superintendent keeps and supports the vision of the district at all of the leadership levels, much of the burden of inclusion may fall on principals. The superintendent should have high expectations for the building leaders. Waters and Marzano (2006) suggest that principals must be expected to be instructional leaders, and district resources should be used to provide the necessary professional development for principals to have the knowledge, skills, and competencies to meet the district goals for student achievement and instruction. The superintendent provides the support and direction for building principals.

Principal leadership is important to the role of the superintendent in a rural district for two reasons. First, superintendents in rural districts may take on many of the roles of the principal (Jacobson, 1988), which means that the research related to effective principals may relate to the role of an effective superintendent in a small district. Second, for the

superintendent to be effective, he or she needs to have effective principals, because, as suggested by Waters and Marzano (2006), principals are expected to have the knowledge, skills, and competencies to lead buildings in meeting the district goals.

The roles of the superintendent and principals cross over and support each other in many ways, especially in rural districts. Jacobson (1988) contends that the role of an effective rural superintendent is much like the role of an effective inner-city principal. Jacobson summarizes the major objectives of effective inner-city principals as needing to:

- Establish clear organizational goals and make improved student performance the unitary mission of their schools.
- Involve their faculties in the planning required to reach this goal.
- Monitor the performance of both students and teachers.
- Protect their teachers from disruptive events that interfere with the task of teaching.
- Provide their teachers with the assistance as needed and selectively recruit teachers who subscribe to the goals of the school. (p. 17)

In case studies, Jacobson (1988) found that the role of an effective rural superintendent closely matched the role of an effective urban principal, with one major difference. The superintendent had the additional role of overseeing the overall education program of the district. Jacobson (1988) described the difference between the effective superintendent and ineffective superintendent as follows:

> One superintendent viewed his job as providing only the educational services that his community wanted. Since the community did not want much from its schools, that is what it got. In contrast, the effective superintendent viewed his job as requiring him to educate his community and school board about the educational services they *should*

> want. He actively worked to raise community expectations as to what students could achieve and then worked to ensure that his faculty and students met those expectations. This commitment to achievement was internalized by the community, and just as his faculty had come to believe that continued improvement in student performance should be the district norm, so, too, had community residents. (p. 21)

A more recent look by Theoharis (2010) at how principals create the environment to improve social justice, such as the ELL and SwD populations being studied here, shows that social justice–oriented principals used specific strategies to "disrupt" injustice (which I discuss further below). Principals advance social justice by using practices that create more inclusive environments for students; build professionalism and the skills necessary to address issues such as poverty, race, and equity; create a more connected school community and climate; and produce more equitable student achievement. Typically, equitable student achievement was produced by addressing the first three practices. A commonality among these leaders was the strong moral purpose of social justice despite the fact that school leaders are more likely to be trained and rewarded for being managers than as leaders who address equity.

Although Theoharis focuses mainly on principals, the research is relevant to this study, because in rural districts, many of the roles of principals cross over to the superintendent (Jacobson, 1988). Especially in rural districts, superintendents need to understand the role of the building principals to provide the necessary help, support, and training to assist them in being leaders for equity and excellence rather than allowing them to be technical managers.

Study Rationale

The relevant literature for this study focuses on four strands: achievement of ELL students, achievement of students with disabilities, educator beliefs and practices, and the

superintendent's role in student achievement. The research in these areas shows that high achievement for both English language learners and students with disabilities is linked to inclusive environments, strong teacher efficacy in the classroom—or the teacher's belief that he or she can teach students and affect student achievement—and the classroom practices used by the teacher. The superintendent not only has an effect on overall student achievement, there are also specific things he or she does in a high-achieving district to affect beliefs and practices. The superintendent affects the principals, mostly through communicating the vision and goals of the district and holding the principal accountable to the vision and goals, and, in turn, the principals affect student achievement.

Each of the strands of literature contributes a piece to the picture of an inclusive, high-achieving district and the effect a superintendent might have on achievement. However, some questions remain unanswered. What would a leader do differently than a leader of a high-achieving school if he or she wanted to ensure high learning for specialized populations such as ELLs and SwD as opposed to just and overall average high achievement? If the leader does something different, what would it be? A school or district can have high achievement on average and still not be addressing the needs of students in traditionally marginalized populations. Districts with high achievement do not necessarily serve students in inclusive settings. In addition, it does not necessarily follow that high achievement overall in a district leads to high achievement of traditionally marginalized subgroups of students. The focus on inclusivity and high achievement for all subgroups of students is the focus of a district leader. Although some research exists in the area of superintendent leadership, the research base is missing the piece that connects a superintendent to the achievement of ELLs and SwD, especially in rural districts. This study addresses this gap in the literature.

Research Question

Although the literature is well developed in defining the role of the superintendent in high-performing schools, there is a lack of literature defining what a superintendent does as it relates to cultivating high achievement for English language learners and students with disabilities, especially in rural settings. This research will focus on the following question: *In rural districts that have been successful, both in terms of high achievement for all students and for ELLs and SwD, what actions do superintendents take that help to cultivate high achievement for both English language learners and students with disabilities?*

Conceptual Framework

This study will examine how actions taken by superintendents influence educator beliefs and practices for ELLs and students with disabilities, two traditionally marginalized groups. I will use two different perspectives to frame this study. One is the work of Theoharis (2010) and social justice leadership, and the other is the work of Fullan (2001) and leadership for change.

Social justice leadership. The first lens used for this study is social justice leadership. Theoharis's (2010) recent research, which builds on his previous work in social justice leadership, discusses strategies that social justice–oriented leaders—in this case, principals—use to "disrupt" injustices in the school. While social justice–oriented superintendents are not specifically my focus, this research suggests practices that successful superintendents are likely to use. Theoharis describes the first injustice as "school structures that marginalize, segregate and impede achievement" (p. 341). The strategies used by principals to address this injustice were to eliminate pullout and other programs that segregated or unnecessarily tracked students, increase rigor in classes and access to opportunities sometimes offered to only some students, increase student learning time and minimize time spent out of school or out of classes, and increase accountability systems for achievement of all students partially through data collection.

The second strategy the principals in Theoharis's (2010) study used to disrupt injustices was to address a "deprofessionalized teaching staff" (p. 341).

> They described two separate components of deprofessionalized teachers. First, these principals reported that their teaching staff, in general, did not possess the skills or will to reach every child. Second, when they arrived as principals in their schools, they felt that too many of the teachers had been previously treated as incompetent and not respected as professionals. The principals narrated that they worked to professionalize their teachers by building staff capacity, recentering staff learning on equity and justice issues, and creating a climate that respected, appreciated, and empowered teaching professionals. (p. 349)

The third injustice principals faced in the Theoharis's (2010) study was the unwelcoming school climate that disconnected the school with the community, especially for marginalized families. To address this concern, the principals created more welcoming environments in their schools, reached out to the community and marginalized families, and incorporated social responsibility into the curriculum at their schools.

The fourth injustice, inequitable student achievement, was seen as the most important and was addressed, in part, by the strategies from the first three injustices. However, the principals saw this injustice as the core of what they did. One principal described it as "permeating everything I did, every decision I made, every conversation I had, and every part of my leadership" (p. 363).

Leadership for change. Connecting the superintendent to achievement at the building level is an important part of my study. I use social justice leadership as a lens for looking at how superintendents made necessary changes in their districts to improve the achievement of ELLs and SwD. I anticipate that successful superintendents in this study will use some of the same strategies to "disrupt injustices" for ELLs and SwD as the principals used in Theoharis's study. Building on Theoharis, my framework is focused on social justice to determine what strategies were used by the superintendents to increase inclusivity, rigor, and access to ELLs and SwD; provide training on beliefs and practices for teaching ELLs and SwD; create welcoming environments for ELLs and SwD and their families; and increase student achievement for ELLs and SwD.

I will take the study one step further by also looking through a second lens of leading in a culture of change (Fullan, 2001), or educational change theory (shortened to change theory from this point on). This approach will help me to look at the district through the lens of social

justice leadership and determine the “how” or the level of “leadership for change” necessary to affect English language learners and students with disabilities. I chose both frameworks for the study so I could examine the problem of achievement for ELLs and SwD through a critical lens of social justice leadership combined with a more structural-functional lens of change leadership. This second lens draws on the empirical research base on effective best practices in leadership for educational reform. Both lenses together help to explore what effect social justice leadership has on ELLs and SwD and which tenets of leadership for change were effective in shifting teacher beliefs and practices to achievement for all students.

The second part of my conceptual framework relates to the influence of the superintendent on change. Fullan (2001) focuses on five key principles that are required by leadership to successfully guide an organization or school district through a process of change: moral purpose, understanding change, developing relationships, knowledge building, and coherence making. According to Fullan (2001), the truly effective leader in a culture of change knows how to use all five principles.

Moral purpose is used to energize people toward a desired goal. Moral purpose cannot only be stated; it must also be accompanied with the strategies necessary to accomplish it. For example, if social justice is the moral purpose, then just stating that social justice is a goal in the district is not enough without creating the actions necessary to help all students achieve. Social justice cannot be the moral purpose while doing nothing about a 20% referral rate for special education students or having pullout programs be the main source of education for ELL students. Moral purpose works with both the end and the means. The leader must know the desired end result and take the necessary actions to get there.

The second leadership principle is to understand change. Change needs to be allowed to happen and needs to be led without being managed or controlled. It is best to have change be pulled by the moral purpose rather than pushed to happen. Fullan (2001) references D. Goleman's 2000 *Harvard Business Review* article, "Leadership That Gets Results" and discusses different styles of leadership, including coercive, authoritative, affiliative, democratic, pacesetting, and coaching. The styles are defined by Goleman (2000) as follows:

1. Coercive--the leader demands compliance. ("Do what I tell you")
2. Authoritative--the leader mobilizes people toward a vision. ("Come with me")
3. Affiliative--the leader creates harmony and builds emotional bonds. ("People come first.")
4. Democratic--the leader forges consensus through participation. ("What do you think?")
5. Pacesetting--the leader sets high standards for performance. ("Do as I do, now.")
6. Coaching--the leader develops people for the future. ("Try this.")

The two leadership styles that affect the climate in a negative way are coercive (where people resent and resist) and pacesetting (where people get burned out). All four of the other styles had a positive impact on both performance and climate. The leaders who have mastered four or more styles had the best performance. Leaders need to understand that implementation dips exist, and they need to appreciate resistance for both political reasons and for the ideas and understandings that resistance can provide. Change is neither a step-by-step nor linear process;

change is more about creating a culture and creating disturbances in a way that moves the organization in the right direction.

The third leadership quality Fullan (2001) focuses on is relationships. One of the areas of importance in developing relationships is creating a professional learning community. Fullan (2001) suggests that if a leader knows how to combine intellectual intelligence with emotional intelligence, then the leader can help to create strong relationships through learning communities while also creating the environment to use those relationships for advancing intellectual intelligence in the organization.

A fourth quality of leadership in a culture of change is knowledge building, which Fullan defines as knowledge sharing, knowledge creation, and knowledge management. He also states that knowledge is a social phenomenon and only becomes valuable in a social context. Because of this social context, leaders should not focus only on information; they should focus on the use of information. External training by itself does not work. The transfer and use of knowledge in the work environment is where organizations often flounder.

Leaders in a culture of change should also be aware of the need for tacit knowledge (skills, beliefs, and understandings below the level of awareness) in addition to explicit knowledge (words, numbers, data, and information). If a leader can create a culture and a space for knowledge to be shared, the learning culture creates itself. The exchange of knowledge impacts the culture rather than the culture impacting the exchange of knowledge. Because of this, Fullan (2001) recommends establishing knowledge-sharing practices. This fits right in with the relationship building piece, because professional learning communities are one of the best places to build knowledge from professional to professional.

Coherence making, summarized as a collaborative environment that uses knowledge sharing and has a shared commitment (Fullan, 2001), is the final quality of a leader in a culture of change. To create coherence, the leader becomes a context setter and a designer of learning experiences (once again, as in professional learning communities) as opposed to the authority figure who has the answers to and "fixes" all the problems. The leader must realize that change is slow, and the leader needs to let go of control and the traditional leadership role. Throughout his book, Fullan (2001) discusses how all five of the factors need to work together in order to make leadership effective in a culture of change.

As Fullan (2001) states, "The single most important factor ensuring that all students meet performance goals at the site level is the leadership of the principal—leadership being defined as 'the guidance and direction of instructional improvement'" (p. 126). An important step in making this change is to create a learning community for principals. This learning is in the context of the work environment "learning with the greater payoff because it is more specific (customized to the situation) and because it is social (involves the group)" (Fullan, 2001, p. 126). These learning communities not only create relationships and a space for sharing knowledge, they also create coherence (shared knowledge and commitment through collaboration) among teachers, principals, and the central office. This study will discover the extent to which the lenses of social justice leadership and leadership for change work together to understand the ways a superintendent creates a successful track record of achievement for ELLs and SwD.

What does the superintendent have to do to create change in a culture where beliefs and practices support the achievement of ELLs and SwD? This study will look at how two superintendents create the change needed for high achievement for *all* students, not just high

achievement for students on average. Many districts are seen as good districts when they have above-average overall achievement among students compared to the state or nation. Many of those same districts have traditionally marginalized populations who do not have the same high achievement as the district average. The goal of this study is to look at two districts that have high average student achievement and also have high achievement among traditionally marginalized groups (ELLs and SwD in particular for this study). What type of leadership was in place in these two districts? What changes did district leaders make to align beliefs and practices with high achievement for all? What leadership and change processes took place in order for ELLs and SwD to also have high achievement in those districts? The districts I study have high achievement on average in the district, yet they also show achievement for SwD and ELLs as subgroups of the overall population. If students are achieving on average, but traditionally marginalized students are not achieving, then the district is not being successful. I examine the direct and indirect ways that the superintendents influence beliefs and practices that have an effect on the achievement of ELLs and SwD.

Chapter 3

Research Methods

In this chapter I begin to elaborate on my qualitative and case study approach to inquiry, including how the districts were chosen. I then explain the procedures and instruments used to complete the study. Subsequently, I explain how I analyzed the data, including a pilot study as well as a description of how I addressed trustworthiness, ethics, and limitations. Finally, I establish the significance of the study.

Qualitative Design

This study examines school district leaders and what those leaders do to cultivate beliefs and practices that contribute to high performance of students with disabilities and English language learners. To address my research question, I used a qualitative approach that includes two case studies. Qualitative data, as described by Miles and Huberman (1994), is "usually in the form of words rather than numbers…a source of well grounded, rich descriptions and explanations of processes in identifiable local contexts" (p. 1). Miles and Huberman (1994) also note that qualitative data can help "preserve chronological flow, see precisely which events led to which consequences, and derive fruitful explanations" (p. 1). Finally, they contend that qualitative data, "especially organized into incidents or stories, have a concrete, vivid, meaningful flavor that often proves far more convincing to a reader—another researcher, a policymaker, a practitioner—than pages of summarized numbers" (p. 1). This study explores qualitative data with two case studies telling the stories of leaders who are successful with advancing the achievement of English language learners and students with disabilities.

Case Studies

According to Yin (2003), a case study is preferred "when 'how' or 'why' questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context" (p. 1). Because my study was of two high-performing school districts that serve both ELLs and SwD populations, case study was the most appropriate method. In support of qualitative case studies, Merriam (1998) emphasizes that these studies have been widespread in the field of education for nearly 30 years. In her view, a qualitative case study is "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 191). Becker (1968; as cited in Merriam, 1998) defines the dual purpose of a case study as "to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the groups under study" and "to develop general theoretical statements about regularities in social structure and processes" (p. 192). Studying district leadership with a focus on ELLs and SwD required looking at how leaders carry out the work of social justice for all children within a real-life context of the school environment. Simply put, this study sought to understand how these leaders worked within their political and social environments to cultivate practices that are in alignment with raising achievement for all children.

The decision to use two case studies, as opposed to a single case study, is supported by Yin (2003). Yin's recommendation is to use a single case study when it represents the critical case or when a single case is unique, representative, or typical. Although evidence from multiple cases is often considered to be more compelling, Yin warns that multiple case studies can be beyond the scope of a single researcher. To gain a deeper understanding of leadership in a school district that is high performing with ELLs and SWD, including more than one site can

enhance the validity or trustworthiness of the findings (Merriam, 1998). Using case studies with two districts allowed me to study the inner workings of the districts in more depth than would have been possible in a study of multiple districts, yet it gave me more information than a single case. I used the information from both studies to enhance the validity by looking at the extent to which the two superintendents used consistent practices to cultivate successful achievement for ELLs and SwD.

Case studies can be categorized based on their function and design. Merriam (1998) describes several types of case studies An ethnographic case study focuses on a cultural setting; a historical case study uses primary source material; a historical organizational case study focuses on a specific organization and traces its development; a psychological case study focuses on the individual; a sociological case study looks at the constructs of society and socialization in studying educational phenomenon; a descriptive case study presents a detailed account of the phenomenon under study; an interpretive case study contains rich, thick descriptive data to develop conceptual categories or illustrate, support, or challenge theoretical assumptions; an analytical case study is defined by complexity, depth, and theoretical orientation; and an evaluative case study is rich in description, explanation, and judgment. This study is an interpretive case study that contains "rich, thick descriptive data used to develop conceptual categories or illustrate, support, or challenge theoretical assumptions held prior to the data gathering" (p. 197). The interpretation of actions of leaders to cultivate beliefs and practices that contribute to high-achieving environment for ELLs and SwD made an interpretive case study the best fit. The cross-case comparison allowed me to gain everyday insights into both leadership for social justice.

Participants

District. For this study, I selected two small rural districts of fewer than 5,000 students. The reason for choosing small rural districts is that most researchers have studied large, urban districts. The problem of unequal learning outcomes for SwD and ELLs is a growing concern for smaller districts but small districts typically do not have the same resources (such as personnel and finances) as larger districts. Many times in smaller districts the superintendent or principal is also the curriculum director, the ELL coordinator, the staff development planner, the human resources manager, as well as the building or district leader. The way small districts make change toward equity is potentially quite different than the way such changes may occur in large districts, which often have a staff supporting ELL or curriculum development.

High achievement is more difficult to define for a small district because many times data are not publicly available. Therefore, data have to be averaged over the years that data are available and there can be a large margin of error. After defining the level of achievement I was seeking for the districts, I verified with the state department of education that the districts were achieving overall and for the subpopulations. That is, districts described in this study have shown high achievement for all populations, including ELLs and SwD, and have shown steadily improving student achievement of ELLs and SwD. The districts' high performance is defined by the following:

- being at or above the state average in the reading and math portions on the state test for most years in a three- to five-year period
- a demonstrated increase in performance of ELLs and SwD based on a gain of 5% to 10% or more over a three- to five-year period, or scores above or within 5% of the state average (to allow for error) for the same population of students

during the leadership of the superintendent and the recommendation of state leadership in the area of ELL and SwD

- an ELL population of at least 10% of the district population

District 1, Oakwood, has an ELL population of 11.8% (up 4.3% over the last 10 years) and a special education population of 10.1% (down from 18.6% over the last 9 years of reported data). District 2, Gateway, has an ELL population of 13.4% (up 11.2% over the last 10 years) and a special education population of 10.7% of the population (relatively steady over the last 9 years of reported data).

Screening the districts. I initially obtained leads on districts through professors at the University of Wisconsin–Madison and through other dissertators who are studying high-achieving districts. I also used information from contacts at the state department of public instruction who were in charge of ELL programming and SwD programming. I confined my search to two Midwestern states because I had myriad contacts and detailed information about the two states I considered. In my search, two districts—Gateway and Oakwood—were consistently named as districts that do well with both ELLs and SwD. Still, I took the complete list of recommendations and used publicly available data to verify enrollment and district achievement data. I began with the list of 13 districts shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Student Populations by District

District	Student population	Students with disabilities (%)	ELL students (%)
Oakwood	1,250	11.0	12.7
Nature Way	1,716	11.8	5.5
Green River	2,032	15.5	16.0
Eagle Ridge	2,718	13.3	6.1
South City	3,392	10.8	1.1
Mount Gray	3,595	15.2	2.3
Gateway	4,675	10.6	13.0
Westside	5,840	11.8	6.1
River Edge	7,023		
Center City	8,522		
Northside	10,806		
Eastgate	13,906		
Orange Grove	15,078		

After obtaining information about the size of each district, I eliminated River Edge, Center City, Northside, Eastgate, and Orange Grove because they did not meet the enrollment requirement for my definition of a small district. I kept Westside initially even though it was somewhat over my total enrollment criterion. Nature Way, Eagle Ridge, South City, Mount Gray, and Westside were eliminated because they did not meet the requirement of having a 10% ELL student population. Green River was a concern because of the high number of students labeled as students with disabilities and the possibility that students with disabilities were being over-identified. Oakwood, Green River, and Gateway had the highest potential in the list of districts to study.

Next, I present the achievement trends for these three districts on the state test. The data are district wide and averaged for all years that data were available, including all schools and the tested grade levels of 3 through 10.

Table 2

Achievement of Students with Disabilities

	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010
			Average scores in reading (%)		
Oakwood	45.1	49.5	44.6	43.7	42.7
Green River	*	42.5	43.1	32.5	36.3
Gateway	58.5	62.9	60.2	51.9	47.9
State	46.9	48.2	47.6	46.5	46.5
			Average scores in math (%)		
Oakwood	52.3	44.6	43.1	38.8	41.2
Green River	*	36.5	45.0	37.5	43.1
Gateway	45.3	50.3	51.7	47.4	44.7
State	39.7	43.3	42.4	44.6	45.0

* Insufficient number of students to report student data.

Students with disabilities in Oakwood scored within 5% of the state average for both reading and math in four of the five years. Oakwood had also seen a significant drop in the number of students identified as special education during the term of the current superintendent. In one year, students with disabilities in Green River scored within 5% of the state data for reading, and in two years they scored within 5% of the state average for math. Students with disabilities in Gateway scored above the state average in both reading and math in all cases but one, and in that one year they were within 5% of the state average.

Table 3

Achievement of ELL Students

	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010
			Average scores in reading (%)		
Oakwood	54.2%	63.9%	77.9%	59.3%	62.1%
Green River	61.0%	56.4%	56.5%	61.6%	58.4%
Gateway	56.6%	55.1%	56.5%	57.8%	59.6%
State	52.6%	52.1%	53.7%	52.5%	54.2%
			Average scores in math (%)		
Oakwood	47.9%	56.8%	47.5%	46.3%	53.9%
Green River	53.8%	60.6%	50.9%	59.6%	58.5%
Gateway	49.7%	48.3%	52.0%	49.7%	53.7%
State	49.5%	53.0%	51.3%	53.9%	55.9%

All three districts had achievement above the state average for ELLs in reading. In three of the five years, ELL students in Oakwood scored within 5% of the state average in math. ELL students in Green River and Gateway all five years scored within 5% of the state average in math.

Table 4

Achievement of All Students

Reading	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010
Oakwood	81.0%	82.7%	85.1%	82.9%	82.7%
Green River	81.6%	82.4%	83.5%	81.5%	81.9%
Gateway	88.6%	89.1%	89.1%	87.8%	87.1%
State	81.8%	82.2%	82.0%	81.5%	81.7%
Math	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010
Oakwood	78.7%	77.4%	76.6%	78.8%	79.3%
Green River	70.9%	76.0%	76.7%	77.3%	78.7%
Gateway	82.8%	83.7%	83.3%	84.8%	82.9%
State	72.8%	75.2%	74.9%	76.9%	77.4%

Students in Oakwood and Green River had achievement scores above the state average in at least four of five years in reading, and students in Oakwood scored above the state average in math in all five years. Gateway students in all five years scored above the state average in both reading and math. I consulted experts at the state department of education who work with all of the districts. They suggested Oakwood and Gateway as the districts to be studied both because of the superintendent leadership and because of the positive results of the two districts with respect to the additional state test that is given specifically for ELL students. Both districts met all objectives for their ELL students in all of the categories for all reported years. Gateway had had instructional practices in place for longer, and the results were easy to see. Since Oakwood was still in the change process and sample sizes were small and sometimes nonexistent, the state verification helped to confirm Oakwood as the district to study. The state department of education also noted that both districts were making positive changes in the area of SwD.

Because Oakwood and Gateway were both recommended from the beginning by several sources as districts that had superintendents who were leaders in the area of ELL and SwD, Oakwood and Gateway were high achieving according to the defined criteria and both districts had achievement for ELLs and SwD, I used the screening tool (see Appendix A) to determine whether the superintendents in these two districts had a significant impact on the achievement, namely through increasing achievement or growth.

Both superintendents described the change they had seen in achievement of ELL students and the process they were using to address the needs of both ELLs and SwD. They also both described the training they had as part of their educational leadership program and superintendent training that addressed social justice and traditionally marginalized populations.

Oakwood shared the growth the district has seen on district MAP (Measures of Academic Progress) testing for students overall as well as SwD and ELLs.

Entry. I gained initial entrance to both Gateway and Oakwood by contacting the superintendents for the screening process. I explained my study, including my research question, and the process that I planned to use to study the district. After determining that the districts fit the criteria, I obtained permission for the study and formal approval to conduct the study from each district.

Procedures

My research question was: In districts that have been successful in terms of high achievement for all students, what actions do superintendents take that help to cultivate high achievement for both English language learners and students with disabilities? In determining the most effective way to collect qualitative data to address my research question, I looked at the work of Wolcott (1994), who suggests that there are "three major modes through which qualitative researchers gather their data: participant observation (experiencing), interviewing (enquiring), and studying materials prepared by others (examining)" (p. 573). To gather data for this study, I used qualitative interviews and collected relevant district documents (such as state test scores, assessments, staff development plans, and meeting notes). I also observed an administrative meeting at each site.

Interview participants. The most relevant participants to interview in each of the districts were the administrators: the superintendent, student services director, ELL coordinator, curriculum director, and three principals. The student services director, ELL coordinator, and curriculum director contributed their perspective regarding the relative effect of decisions made by the respective superintendent as well as information on how teachers

responded to the actions taken at both a district and building level. In a district that does well with SwD and ELL students, there is always the possibility that a curriculum director, student services director, or ELL coordinator are driving forces behind successful reform in addition to the superintendent. The interviews with these key personnel helped me to explore their perspectives regarding their influence on the superintendent and to verify the superintendent's statements. I selected the principals through discussion with the superintendent. I was most interested in the principal with the longest tenure in the district. My next priority was the principal of the school with the highest number of ELLs and SwD, followed by the principal whose school had the highest achievement for ELLs and SwD. Finally, I sought principals based on their level of follow-through on district initiatives as perceived by the superintendent. If all of the above criterion were met by more than three principals, my plan was to select principals from the list of qualifying principals randomly. In the first district (Oakwood) there were only four principals. One of the principals was also the special education director. Therefore, in Oakwood I interviewed all four principals, including the one who was a special education director, because I would have interviewed that position anyway. In Gateway, a larger district, most of the principals had been in the district for a number of years, and the superintendent wanted to ask them for their permission to participate. Two elementary principals were willing to participate. Both had been in the district for the tenure of the current superintendent. I recruited a secondary principal to be the third principal to interview. His building was the one involved most closely with the change in ELL services. I had one less administrative interview in Oakwood because the roles of curriculum coordinator and ELL coordinator were held by the same person.

In addition to the administrator interviews, I planned to interview four teachers in each district, including two teachers who had been recommended by the principal as teachers who embraced the change process and one or two teachers whose beliefs and practices had significantly changed the since the beginning of the process. I wanted at least one of the teachers to be from special education or ELL. Both districts were aware of my requests for the types of teachers, and both had discussions at the administrative level to decide which teachers I should interview. However, both districts offered me three teachers to interview instead of four. I decided to interview three teachers and then decide if a fourth teacher would still add value to the research. Because the change process is often different for every person, my hope was that these teachers would provide the perspective of teachers for whom change was easy and of those who had a more difficult time with the change process. After gathering data and doing initial analyses, I decided not to have the districts select a fourth teacher for me to interview. The goal of these interviews was to determine how actions taken by the superintendent cultivated change in teacher practices and beliefs related to success of ELLs and students with disabilities. The feedback from one of the teachers was very valuable, but that teacher was in a quasi-administrative role. I did not feel as though the other teacher interviews had enough information about the superintendent's role in the change process. They were more aware of what the principal in the building did, and some inferences could be made based on the interviews from the other administrators, but not enough to warrant a fourth teacher interview. When asked directly what effect the superintendent had on ELLs and SwD, with the exception of the teacher who had a partial administrative role, the teachers said they did not know whether changes were a result of the superintendent or another administrator.

Interviews. The research interviews comprised a major part of the data in this study. The qualitative research interview is a tool well described by Kvale (1996) as:

> an interpersonal situation, a conversation between two partners about a theme of mutual interest. It is a specific form of human interaction in which knowledge evolves through a dialogue… A research interviewer uses him- or herself as a research instrument, drawing upon an implicit bodily and emotional mode of knowing that allows a privileged access to the subject's lived world. (p. 435)

Kvale (1996) also states that the purpose of a qualitative interview is to obtain "qualitative descriptions of the life world of the subject with respect to interpretation of their meaning" (p. 435). The interviews with the superintendents and principals helped me to understand firsthand how their actions cultivate teacher practices that contribute to the success of ELLs and students with disabilities. The interviews with the other administrators and teachers added an outside viewpoint regarding how leader actions from either the superintendent or principals affected them. After interviewing, collecting data, and conducting observations, I followed up with both of the superintendents and other interviewees to ensure that the data I had collected were accurate.

The interviews at Oakwood and at Gateway took place in a vacant room in the district office, and sometimes in the office of the administrator or teacher I was interviewing. The interviews took place during the school day and during a spring vacation day. They were about one hour in length. I recorded the interviews and took notes during the interviews. I had the interviews transcribed and entered the transcriptions into an NVivo research software program for analysis. The interview questions and probes (see Appendix B) had some open-ended questions to allow the interviewees to express their perspective, and some additional probes

toward the end of the interview protocol were used to ask specifically about what the superintendent did or did not do as it relates to the conceptual framework.

Observation. The second form of qualitative data I used was observation. I used observation to build on and test the data collected during the interviews. I observed a meeting in each district that involved the superintendent leading a meeting. I selected the type of observation after the interviews. I used the interviews as an opportunity to ask the interviewees to identify the types of observations that would show the superintendent in a leadership role that related to achievement in the district. Using observation in this way was a powerful way to validate the data gathered in interviews and to get insider experience in the district. Observations in the district provided data that helped to make sense of the teacher and administrator interviews and to see firsthand what I had learned about in the interviews. Throughout the interviews, as I gathered information about what types of observation would be helpful or supportive to show the superintendent having influence on beliefs and practices, the participants in both districts recommended that I observe the superintendent running an administrative meeting. In Oakwood, the meeting was a regular meeting with the administrative team and building and union representatives. In Gateway, the observation was an administrative leadership meeting.

The meetings I observed were recommended as ones that were likely to impact teacher or administrator beliefs or practices through the superintendent's leadership, and the meetings were led or directed by the superintendent. I observed meetings with the goal of seeing the types of discussion related to the superintendent's actions as they relate to either social justice or change. I used an observation protocol (see Appendix C) and took notes during the meetings to help me identify the actions taken that helped to cultivate a change in beliefs and practices or

that related to high achievement for English language learners, students with disabilities, or both groups. I used the same observation protocol for walk-throughs with the principals and superintendent. Walk-throughs in this case were building tours to determine whether the building layout and structure influenced (positively or negatively) the practices put in place for achievement. In the walk-throughs, I looked for practices in the classrooms and building that are consistent with the literature (e.g., inclusive environments) and that support the practices implemented by the superintendent. I entered the written notes into NVivo for analysis. The notes were not shared with the administrative team.

Document Analysis. I collected relevant documents from the districts as a third form of qualitative data. Whitt (1992) divides document analysis into two categories: public records and personal documents. She describes public records as "materials created and kept for the purpose of attesting to an event or providing an accounting" (p. 447). She also states that:

> Public records are particularly useful in describing institutional characteristics, such as backgrounds and academic performance of students, and in identifying institutional strengths and weaknesses, such as human and financial resources or consistency in what the organization says about itself to internal and external audiences; institutional values such as commitment to diversity or the importance of out-of-class experiences for achieving the institution's mission. (p. 448)

The documents I collected included publicly available state test data and assessment data to understand the achievement trends of ELLs and students with disabilities relevant to my research question. I used the documents from the district to triangulate the data by supporting, modifying, or contradicting the data I had collected during the interviews. Initially the data I collected were from the state department of education website for district data. To verify the

ELL achievement data in the smaller of the two districts, I requested that the state department of education run a report for me on the two districts to verify that the districts had met measurement objectives on the state ELL test for the same years five years as the state test data that was collected on the districts. The state data for ELL achievement supported that the districts were achieving with ELLs. This data was actually more valid because the test is designed for determining the achievement of ELL students as opposed to a state test that is in a language other than the student's first language and given without consideration for the language barrier.

Instrumentation

The qualitative method of interviews was an effective way to discover how district leaders bring about change in beliefs and implement the practices necessary for achievement of ELLs and SwD. The document analysis provided the background necessary to show that the district met the necessary criterion for the study and that the district has indeed shown the necessary student achievement among the populations studied. Observation supported and provided an additional lens to the findings in the interviews. Instruments for each type of data collection centered on the major themes of the conceptual frameworks of the study, such as creating a culture and a space for knowledge to be shared, developing a shared moral purpose, understanding how to implement change, creating the opportunity for developing relationships, and disrupting injustices that keep ELLs and SwD from achieving at high levels.

Interviews. To guide the interviews, I developed an interview protocol (see Appendix B) that included opening questions to break the ice, a set of questions that addresses the research question, and then two closing questions. Some key questions were:

1. What were the key change processes needed to cultivate teacher practices at any level (district, school, teacher) that contributed to achievement for ELLs? SwD?
    a. What actions do you take to get teachers to enhance learning (that overcome the barriers)?
2. Tell me about a time when you did something to get teachers on track.
3. What did you do to help teachers or administrators to make change?
4. What specific actions have you taken to help principals to cultivate effective classrooms for ELLs? SwD?

Observations. I used observation in the form of an administrative meeting and a school walk-through. The observation protocol was a checklist of features from the framework of social justice and change. I used the checklist to identify which of the aspects are observed and how they are used (see Appendix C). I also took notes during the observations and entered them into NVivo in the areas where they applied to the framework.

Document Collection. With the help of the superintendent and other administrators, I gathered school assessment data. I accessed the state tests from the state website and the state department of education. In addition, I collected handouts that were given at the meetings I attended and handouts from presentations given by the districts.

Analysis

During and after data collection, I began analysis of the multiple sources collected. As I read through the interviews and documents, I looked for patterns and stories within the data. Glesne (1999) describes data analysis as follows:

> Data analysis involves organizing what you have seen, heard, and read so that you can make sense of what you have learned. Working with the data, you describe, create

> explanations, pose hypotheses, develop theories, and link your story to other stories. To do so, you must categorize, synthesize, search for patterns, and interpret the data that you have collected. (p. 130)

I used the constant comparative method of analyzing data that Bogdan and Biklen (1998) describe as "a research design for multi-data sources." They also state that "the formal analysis begins early in the study and is nearly completed by the end of data collection" (p. 66). Data collection and observation were an ongoing process.

Interviews. After each interview, I set aside time to write up field notes about the interview. Using the interview protocol, I wrote out responses in as much detail as I could remember, including the emotions or inflections expressed for any particular interview question. I also had the interview transcribed immediately after the interview. I analyzed each interview using my field notes and began to develop ideas of leadership practices from the first interview forward using the frameworks of social justice leadership and leadership for change. When the notes were put in NVivo, I analyzed them by way of the categories or nodes for the research question, namely: creating inclusive environments, equitable student achievement, addressing a professionalism and skills for equity, connections with the community and marginalized families, rigor and access, moral purpose, understanding change, developing relationships, knowledge building, and coherence making. I did not need to make changes in the interview protocol. I did use two forms of recording as a backup. After the notes were transcribed I deleted the backup recording. I took notes in the margins during the interview on things I wanted to clarify, determine the validity of, or get additional information about from the interview. I found that sometimes my follow-up questions had been answered during the main part of the interview, but if they weren't answered I used the notes in the margin to

remember the additional questions. When the transcribed interviews were finished, I uploaded them into NVivo data analysis software for coding and analysis. My analysis investigated how each of the following tenets creates the change needed to have a high-achieving, equitable district. These were the nodes that were first entered into NVivo. Later, nodes were added to better describe trends being seen in the data that could not be described well under the existing nodes. They were creating a common vision, creating trust, hiring the right people, creating culture, creating a sense of urgency, creating structures, establishing nonnegotiable goals, creating board alignment, and allocating resources to support goals for achievement and instruction. After all of the documents and interviews were entered into NVivo, the nodes were copied into a document separately for analysis.

Observations. I analyzed the data from the meetings by coding the notes and the observation protocol. After the observations, I processed the notes immediately in order to remember the details of the meetings. I coded the notes in the same way the interview notes were coded. I put the notes into NVivo using the same nodes as the interview protocol.

Document Analysis. The documents I collected included state test data and assessment data to understand the achievement trends of ELLs and students with disabilities. I included the key components of the information as notes in NVivo and coded them using the same nodes.

I completed and analyzed all of the data from Oakwood in the winter of 2011, before I started to collect data at the Gateway. The data from Gateway was collected in the late winter and spring of 2011. After analyzing both sites, I then constructed a leadership story at each site and after that looked for similar and dissimilar findings in the leadership practices that advanced educator practices of success for ELLs and SwD at both sites. I followed up with the

superintendent and the curriculum directors, ELL coordinators, and special education directors to verify information after gathering and analyzing the data from each district.

Pilot Study

A conducted pilot study was conducted with a superintendent in a small district that fit many of the criteria of my study. The interview took about 75 minutes, including a discussion of the interview protocol itself. I used the protocol and made some changes to produce the one used in the study (see Appendix B). My original research questions were:

1. What actions did the superintendent take to develop the educator beliefs and practices for successful inclusion?
2. What actions did principals take to develop the educator beliefs and practices for successful inclusion?

As a result of the pilot study, I decided to change the scope of my research question, the conceptual framework, the original method of a single case study, and the focus of the research. My original intent was to examine leadership from the district and school level of an inclusive district. The questions in my interview protocol were centered on how inclusion happened. In the process, I realized that I was not as interested in how inclusion happened as I was in how leadership cultivated educator beliefs and practices to best serve ELLs and SwD. Inclusion seems to be more of a finding or a natural result of the process of increased achievement for ELLs and SwD rather than an up-front criterion. Often, inclusion is also narrowly defined as a structural change, and that focus would likely miss the actions by superintendents that seem associated with a constellation of practices (suggested by both leadership for social justice and leadership for change) that positively influence achievement of ELLs and SwD. As a result of this new focus, I added leadership for change to the conceptual

framework. Looking at leadership and change from both the district and building level also seemed like too much to focus on in one study. So I decided to look at the study from the effect of the superintendent instead of both the superintendent and principals. Because of this change, I also decided to do two case studies to create a stronger study with a more narrow focus. This allowed me to look at two superintendents and find similarities and differences in the practice and results of their social justice leadership. I expected inclusion to be very much in evidence in a district with social justice leadership, so my findings would illuminate leadership practices assuming inclusion as an expectation. My new research question, after these adjustments, became: In districts that have been successful in terms of high achievement for all students, what actions do superintendents take that help to cultivate high achievement for both English language learners and students with disabilities?

Trustworthiness, Positionality and Ethical Considerations

Trustworthiness. Researchers use at least two techniques to ensure that a qualitative study is trustworthy. The most common and inexpensive techniques are "triangulating among different data sources, writing with detailed and thick description, and taking the entire written narrative back to participants in member checking" (Creswell, as cited in Conrad, Haworth, Lattuca, 2001, p. 290). I used all three methods of trustworthiness. I used a member check by following up with the superintendent and other administrative team members to answer additional questions; get clarification; and verify the accuracy of what was found in other interviews, observations, and the collected data. I also used detailed description in observation protocols to enhance validity by making sure "that the findings are transferable between the researcher and those being studied" (Conrad et al., 2001, p. 287). I used multiple sources of data, including test data, interviews from multiple levels, observations, and data from sources such as staff development and district the state department of education in triangulating themes to generate theory with confidence. Using two different cases enabled me to confirm and disconfirm emerging findings as well as investigate aspects of both leadership frameworks. Triangulation uses multiple sources of data to support or contradict theories or findings. The researcher looks for recurring evidence within the data to find enough support to substantiate the theory or finding. Conrad et al. (2001) recommend enhancing validity by using triangulation to compile enough evidence to "formulate a compelling whole" and that "to demonstrate credibility, the weight of evidence should become persuasive" (p. 287). I used triangulation in my study to assure that the data gathered and the findings from the data were as accurate as possible.

Positionality. Over the past 13 years I have worked as a curriculum director and an assistant superintendent. I worked in three different districts as well as for an educational agency that served 35 school districts. These jobs required me to work with and get to know curriculum directors and superintendents all over the state. The superintendents and curriculum directors I interviewed knew me through these roles. There is the possibility in the interviews that my role had an influence on the way questions were answered, and a possibility that some things were shared or not shared because of my position. For example, it was likely assumed that I didn't need an explanation about their curriculum and it was assumed that I knew what best practices and other educational initiatives were used in the districts. It is possible that the findings didn't show as much in areas like the curriculum because of these assumptions.

Ethical considerations. One of the most important ethical considerations in research is to do no harm. In this study, it was necessary to ensure the confidentiality of the districts and the individual participants. Typically, interviewees and districts "should not be identifiable in print and…they should not suffer harm or embarrassment as a consequence of the research" (Conrad et al., 2001, p. 516). I have used pseudonyms for districts, schools, and individuals throughout. I supplied the research questions for the study to the superintendents and other participants in advance, and they gave explicit consent to participate in the research study. There was minimal risk to participants, because the names of the districts and the names of all participants were changed in the notes, in the written study, and in NVivo to protect their privacy. Data were stored as Superintendent District 1, Teacher District 2, Elementary Principal Building 1, and District 1, and so on. The data will be kept in a secure file for seven years and then destroyed. The files will be kept in secure digital formats.

Limitations

The most significant limitation of this study is the sample size. While the study can contribute to the overall understanding of the effect of superintendent leadership in a small school district, the study was not large enough to draw definite conclusions that are generalizable. This information aside, in-depth study of two successful districts, offers important findings and implications for rural district leadership.

Significance and Conclusion

This study addresses gaps in the current literature related to district leaders who create the change in beliefs and practices necessary to address the achievement of ELLs and SwD. My findings contribute to the field of educational leadership in several ways. To begin with, this study identifies what district leaders do to create the necessary changes in beliefs and practices for high achievement of ELLs and SwD. Second, this study will fill gaps in empirical research of educational leadership. This study provides empirically based findings related to the work of rural superintendents as they lead school districts, create necessary changes in teacher beliefs and practices, and raise achievement levels of ELLs and SwD.

As a nation, we are in a crisis. We need to find a solution to the achievement gap and make sure we are educating all children. It is a social crisis and an economic crisis. In a March 15, 2010, *Newsweek* article, Thomas and Wingert (2010) stated:

> The relative decline of American education at the elementary- and high-school levels has long been a national embarrassment as well as a threat to the nation's future. Once upon a time, American students tested better than any other students in the world. Now, ranked against European schoolchildren, America does about as well as Lithuania, behind at least 10 other nations. Within the United States, the achievement gap between

> white students and poor and minority students stubbornly persists—and as the population of disadvantaged students grows, overall scores continue to sag. (p. 24)

This crisis can no longer be ignored. However complex the solution might be, we need to address this “education debt” (Ladson-Billings, 2006) that is every bit as important as the national debt.

Chapter 4

Oakwood School District: Excellence and Equity for *All* Students

Demographics and Location

Oakwood School District is a rural Midwest district in a community that is located about 20 miles from one major metropolitan city and about 60 miles from another major metropolitan city. The city has a population of about 6,100, an increase of 47% since 1990 and 13% since 2000. The district has a total enrollment of about 1,250 students: 81% White, 14% Hispanic, 3% Black, 2% Asian, and a small number of American Indians. Over 30% of the students in the district are considered economically disadvantaged, and 11% are students with disabilities. In the last 10 to 12 years, the Hispanic population has doubled, the percentage of economically disadvantaged students has increased from 18% to over 30%, and the population of students with disabilities has fallen from almost 19% to 11%. The Oakwood School District has reduced the percentage of students with disabilities under the leadership of the current superintendent by properly identifying students. The district was chosen for my study based on the high level of student achievement in reading and math for the years 2005-2006 to 2009-2010 and because it was identified by the state department of education as a district where the superintendent was believed to have an impact on ELLs and SwD. In addition, the district had achievement data at or above state growth, with a few fluctuations within 5% in reading and math. Students identified as ELLs also met the measures identified for the study for the years listed above. In addition, ELL tests met state growth measures (see Appendix D).

Superintendent Gable and the Administrative Team

Dr. Marilyn Gable is the superintendent of Oakwood and has worked in the district for nine years, six of them as superintendent. She has a background as a teacher for 19 years, as a

special education director, and as superintendent. She prides herself on being a hands-on leader. Dr. Gable spends a lot of time in the buildings in the district. She also has a strong belief in a high level of professionalism. She claims to know the names and faces of each person who is resistant to change and she uses that information to help the district keep moving despite resistance. Dr. Gable expects a high level of excellence, and equity for all students. When she talks about equity, however, she means *all* children, not just traditionally underserved children.

The district houses a primary building with early childhood through grade two, an elementary building with grades three through six, a middle school, and a high school. The schools are all within walking distance of each other. Of the seven-member administrative team in the district, all but one has turned over in the six years that the current superintendent has served. This gave the superintendent a unique opportunity to select her own team of administrators. Because of the small size of the district, the superintendent, at times, was also the director of special education. Currently the administrative team includes the superintendent, the curriculum director, and the four building principals.

Leadership for Change

In this section, I will discuss five themes related to leadership for change that Dr. Gable consistently demonstrated. These themes are moral purpose, aligning the culture and supports with the moral purpose, developing relationships, knowledge building for excellence and equity, and coherence making.

Moral purpose. Everything in Oakwood School District is designed around the moral purpose of excellence and equity for *all* children. This sense of moral purpose begins with the superintendent. Dr. Gable said,

> One of the things I think I'm most proud of in the district is that I would say we've raised the level of professionalism in the district significantly. I think people have an understanding that I am interested in *both excellence and equity*. It doesn't matter who your family is or what your family name is, or how long you might have lived in this district, the expectations are the same for everyone.

Gable hires administrators and other staff members who share the core value of excellence and equity, she plans professional development around it, she has conversations with staff about it, and her decisions are made around that belief and vision. The staff definitely struggled with deficit thinking when Gable began working in the district. Deficit thinking is the belief that the student is not achieving because he or she lacks something or there is some outside force at fault. An example might be that there is a problem with the family, a problem with the student, or poverty. Deficit thinking blames the child, the family, and society rather than looking for ways the teacher or district can serve the child and view his or her strengths. Dr. Gable is unwavering in the belief that all students should be served and that they do not need to be labeled to be served.

> In our district, like lots of districts at the time, special education was viewed as the place where the needs of students got met, so if you had any need whatsoever, the kid must be special ed and therefore they somehow got identified. There was really not a great deal of regard for the criteria for eligibility. So we did a lot of work first of all in special education in those first three years to make sure we were identifying kids who

> were truly disabled. The other thing is that the groundwork began for providing other services to meet the needs of kids. The reason teachers would refer kids was because there was a need. They needed some intervention or assistance, so [we were] looking at other places where those services could be delivered, not having to identify or label a kid to receive those services.

All of the staff members I interviewed agreed, and one teacher in the district explained,

> I think it started with undoing deficit thinking and really looking at the criteria of how to identify students with a disability—that it wasn't our only option. If a kid wasn't doing well, did they really need the criteria to be identified as a student with a disability? And for a while this was our only option.

When asked why students succeed in the district, one of the principals talked about the high expectations of the superintendent and described the superintendent's "no excuses" approach.

> Leadership has a lot to do with it. It starts with [the superintendent]. She really takes no excuses. It's like, okay that child is struggling with language—what are we going to do? I appreciate that outlook. Getting off the EEL subject or special needs, if a child has a hard home life, what are we going to do because that is not going to change? So we need to do something for that kid and give him the best shot at being successful in school and life…. I think the main message from that is we are going to do everything possible to make these kids successful. No excuses. Nothing. It's going to be done.

Fullan (2001) discusses how leaders need to create the culture necessary for change and create the "disturbances" necessary to motivate people to change. The leader guides or pulls the people in the organization toward a moral purpose rather than forcing or pushing change on

them. Oakwood School District has experienced a lot of change under the leadership of the superintendent. There were changes in curricular materials, changes in programs, changes in teacher evaluation, changes in the process of identifying students for special education, changes in how teachers collaborate, and many changes in leadership throughout the district. Dr. Gable describes that the amount of change that the district went through under her leadership was not simply for change's sake but for the sake of the students:

> I have described the transformation here in our movement forward as rather an ambitious undertaking. I know there are, at times, some of our staff [and] teachers feel that we're moving too fast and we're doing too many things. I know that that's probably not unique to our district, but, nonetheless, kids only get one shot. So we can't wait to improve a particular area for several years, we have to get to the business of that, and I realize that everyone's working hard, hard as they can. I try to reinforce that and appreciate and recognize those efforts. But we need to move forward, because it is about the kids.

The superintendent leads through her work with the administrative team. All of the administrators I interviewed agreed that the administrative leadership meetings were critical to the work on equity and excellence. They meet for two hours every week and discuss important issues in the district. However, the discussions focus mainly on instruction and students. One of the principals described the focus on instruction and student achievement in the administrative leadership meetings by saying:

> In past experiences sometimes you go to meetings and end up talking about just nuts and bolts stuff—anybody can do that. If you want someone to man your building, I can put anybody in that place. But as far as instructional leadership, that's a whole different

> story. That's what [the superintendent] wants, and you can see that that's intertwined with any discussions that we have.

A theme throughout Oakwood School District was that Superintendent Dr. Gable had a laser focus on hiring the right people, from administrators to support staff. Her aim was to hire people who put students first and who believe in excellence and equity for students. An elementary principal who was fairly new to the district described the hiring process: "You can tell the people that she's hired have been hired for a reason because they fit that mold. You just realize that she was looking for a certain person that fit the leadership role she wanted." The high school principal commented that the superintendent's high expectations were known even in the interview questions. She stated, "It starts in the interview process with the sorts of questions that were asked. I think she set a tone that she was looking for an instructional leader and not a building manager."

The same high expectations apply to the hiring of teachers. The team of administrators is included in the first round of the hiring process for every teacher. The group writes down the qualities they are looking for in the teacher. The questions are based off of the qualities with the most important quality being that the teacher believes he or she can teach all children. One of the principals described the process as follows:

> It's a real screening process. Then after that the administrative team—still to this day we do this—does the first round of interviews. We have a protocol of questions that we've developed, too, which was different from prior years of hiring. We came up with questions that were important to us as a district. Some of those things—"How do you teach diversity? How do you differentiate?"

The administrators determine who will move on to interview with the teacher team. The goal is to screen applicants to hire very high-quality teachers who believe and practice equity and excellence. According to one of the principals, the last statement in the interview process is, “In our district we consider the probationary period, or the first three years of teaching, as an extension of the interview process. How you demonstrate professionalism is evidence of raising student achievement during that time.” The superintendent then meets with all new teachers to let them know that her expectations are high. The curriculum director stated, “She always goes in and has a short conversation with [the new teachers] welcoming them to the district, very clear about her expectations of them from day one...but she also says ‘my door is always open.’”

The hiring process is followed by an updated process of teacher evaluation. Under Dr. Gable’s leadership, the process for teacher evaluation was improved to better address teacher quality. One of the principals describes this process:

> So when we came in, there was no supervision or formalized supervision. With [the superintendent]’s help again—we collected our own thoughts about what effective teachers were. Then, as a group, took a look at other district models that we thought would be good, sufficient models, and together we created what was a proficient teacher. Then [we] made up a standard and made up a process and then the next year implemented that process.

Aligning the culture and supports with the moral purpose. In addition to hiring the right people, Dr. Gable has worked to develop relationships with staff, community, and parents. She has also built knowledge through professional development followed by classroom coaching. She hired an almost all-new administrative team and worked with them and through them to change the culture—all with the purpose of creating alignment in the district with the moral purpose of equity and excellence for all students. The superintendent commented about the importance of the administrative team all having the same vision of excellence and equity:

> We've had principals who've been willing to champion those same vision and values. I've had those same expectations so that we could move forward. [Hiring of the staff that works with you is critical], because you learn together and it's getting the right people in the right positions and understanding that every hire in every position in an educational organization is critical.

Addressing the culture and creating an atmosphere of trust *and* high expectations is always a work in progress. Gable hired the leadership team because of their beliefs and vision, but then she allowed them to lead and make their own decisions. She would guide them but not make decisions for them. One of the principals describes this as good, but sometimes frustrating:

> [The superintendent] gives me a lot of freedom, which is good, I appreciate it and she respects my ability to be an administrator, but there are times when I'm saying… "I need you to tell me what I need to do here because I'm not exactly sure." She's always an ear, she's always supportive, and available to bounce ideas off of and so on, but

> sometimes I'm looking for a little more direction than she is willing to give…. It will be good [for me] down the road.

Another principal corroborated this point of view:

> Typically the way I view it is she allowed the building principal to manage their own school, and if I came up to a barrier and if I shared that with her, she would generally give me ideas unless I would ask her to come to the [staff meeting] and say something (which I didn't). I would often ask her advice and then go back and do what I felt I needed to do.

Part of creating the culture for change for the superintendent was not allowing barriers to impede the change process. Gable went above and beyond to provide the resources necessary to make change in the district. She describes how principals are expected to follow the vision, but that they also have to have the necessary tools:

> I suppose I've created a culture in which the expectation is "this is where we're going, and we're expecting that you will come along, and we will provide whatever supports are necessary to help you move along, but we're moving." I think the role of the superintendent is to be the champion of those things, to help facilitate those things, to minimize the barriers to moving forward and in serving the needs of kids, and to provide the support and resources.

There were also times when the superintendent was hands-on with the staff in working to change the culture. Working to change deficit thinking was a theme in everything the superintendent did the first few years, whether it was addressing the entire staff in a meeting, hiring speakers for professional development, or sitting in on individualized education program (IEP) meetings. The curriculum director discussed how the superintendent worked to change

deficit thinking through discussions she had with staff in the IEP meetings. Through this process, as mind-sets changed, the district moved from having students placed in special education and ELL pullout programs to more of a service delivery model where students are given the services they need to access the classroom curriculum as opposed to being taught a separate curriculum in pullout programs. The curriculum director explained:

> I think what was significant in addressing [deficit thinking] is that she went to *every* gosh darn IEP [meeting]. Every single one of them--every single one. I think it's pretty astounding, I don't remember the number, because she always says…I think it was in the hundreds…but she went to so many IEPs because she needed to be hands on. I think that was significant in starting our path to really changing deficit thinking and moving more to a service delivery model [in the classroom] versus having [pullout] programs.

The elementary principal described what the superintendent did with professional development, her high expectations, her hands-on approach, and the many changes that were made in a short time in the district as "the perfect storm." The process wasn't always easy, and the culture took some time to change. When one of the elementary principals first started, she wanted to start a professional book group. She didn't get a great response.

> The first year I was here I thought we'd read a professional book together, and I laid it out so that each staff meeting we would have a discussion and I'd lay out how many pages would need to be read and I had a union person who was very vocal say, "How dare you change our working conditions? You're making us read a book on our own time?" I was like…They were trying to grieve it?

Several years later, the elementary principal describes a different attitude. The culture in her building shifted from one of a mind-set of kids can't learn because they aren't capable or

some other outside excuse, to one of being "professional and nurturing to kids." She credits the superintendent for that change. She says the change had taken some time, and some of the negative people are still there, but the new culture to follow is one of being a really great and professional teacher. "I feel like now [that is] the culture to follow…like the shift has swung to they're the people that are cool. Before when I came in, it was [a culture of deficit thinking]."

Like any district, Oakwood School District has limited financial resources. The staff, however, always felt as though the resources were there to do what needed to be done related to the district vision of serving all students with excellence and equity. The district has one bilingual teacher per building with additional assistants in a district of only 1,250 students. A principal stated that, "We have never struggled for dollars to purchase instructional materials or technology for our ELLs." She also described money for staff development as more than sufficient.

> They have been very gracious with that and for dollars for professional development. Our staff would say to you that they have been told no very little when they want to go to any kind of professional development. And when it comes to special education or ELL, there is plenty of money, so they never get told no.

Two teachers also commented that they felt confident that the resources are there for them. They felt that whatever resources they needed were provided, and they were rarely denied resources as long as they could justify the need and show that it was for students. They felt that the availability of resources accounted for part of the increase in the district test scores.

> [The superintendent] has always been really good at using the money that is provided for our district so we can get the tools and materials that we need to meet kids' needs. I feel like we've added several new programs and materials. I feel like we've never been

> denied. She has always tried to find a way, whether it be different literacy tools or the technology they are trying to bring to the school…more technology than I probably know how to deal with.

The superintendent listens to her administrative team about what is going on in their buildings and makes decisions based on that collective input. The superintendent relied heavily on the curriculum director to implement best practices in instruction. She hired her with the purpose of updating math and literacy instruction and because of her knowledge about instruction, assessment and Response to Intervention (RtI). While Dr. Gable did a lot of professional reading and built her own knowledge and background in the instructional area, the curriculum director was the leader for instructional practices. Dr. Gable met with the curriculum director on a regular basis to discuss instructional practices and she followed the data to make sure that they were improving in all areas. She was knowledgeable and knew how to ask the right questions of the curriculum director, but the curriculum director was trusted to lead the district in best instructional practices. There are times, as an administrative team, when they decided to slow down or speed up a change process based on discussions in administrative meetings, but always keeping the vision of the district.

Developing relationships. The superintendent's ability to build relationships with the leadership team, the staff, the community, and the school board contributes to the change process. She has an open-door policy with everyone in the district. Because it is such a small district, Gable is visible in the buildings, and people know who she is and where her office is. They also feel comfortable walking into her office to talk to her.

The superintendent is known for her collaborative processes. She meets monthly with building representatives, union representatives, and administrators all at the table. They are all

allowed to put agenda items on the table to discuss. The administrative team also meets for two hours weekly. They work together to discuss the direction of the district and give input on how to move forward. The administrative team feels as though Gable listens to their input and makes changes based on their recommendations. The middle school principal described the meeting process as follows:

> We meet weekly, and that provides an opportunity for everybody to get around the table. I think that she gives us some ownership to that. I don't see her making the sole decisions on a lot of things that happen in the district. There's buy-in from others. I think that she—she lets us see the more relaxed side of her also, which I think forms trust.

One of the principals described a more personal side, as he talked about the superintendent telling the administrators that their job was not a 24/7 job.

> With administrators, obviously, you could work all the time, but she is good about letting us know when to leave early or little things like that. She's good about stuff. She tempers her high expectations with some reality checks. So it has been good.

The superintendent also is known for listening to the community and responding to their requests. When the community brought concerns about teacher quality to Gable, she addressed their concerns by letting them know that the district had developed a teacher evaluation process to help teachers to grow or to help them move on if they were not making progress. The district also implemented a new hiring process to create a stronger pool of teachers. One of the principals described how important this new teacher evaluation process was to the community:

> We assured them that we would use the process to either help—it was focused on teacher growth, but if they really weren't meeting the standard we would work to have them make some choices about whether they would stay in the career or not. That was huge in the community and also the hiring process and [the superintendent was] responsible for this.

The superintendent also expressed her desire to stay connected with all communities. One of the fastest growing communities in the district was the Spanish-speaking community. The district had family nights and created two positions to support the Spanish-speaking community. Dr. Gable was particularly proud of the district providing English instruction for Spanish-speaking parents. She expressed that the commitment to work with this community and others was an ongoing effort that was never totally done. Dr. Gable does not expect the community to come to her; she creates pathways to reach out to them.

An informal connection that Dr. Gable cultivated was with a highly educated Latino man in the community who runs two businesses in town and who worked to strengthen the connection between the Hispanic community and the district. The curriculum director called him an "unnamed leader" and explained, "He is just one of those people that everybody kind of trusts. Because he has a good rapport with the district I think that helps." Dr. Gable uses this connection to get a pulse for the Hispanic community when making changes or looking for direction.

The district also hires paraprofessional educators from the Hispanic community who are bilingual and who will make strong connections to the community and provide feedback to the district about perceptions in the community. The curriculum director provided information

about how the superintendent solicits feedback from the community and makes sure they understand the vision:

> [The superintendent] is very clear about what her vision is: equity and excellence for all children. She is very student centered in her conversations with staff and with leadership and with the board. I think she is very purposeful in sharing the process of setting goals for the school district each year, and communicating that.

The curriculum director shared that the board goals are a community process. The community gives input, and the board goals are created around that input with monthly reporting. It was the curriculum director's belief that this process helped to keep the vision in front of the board.

> When it comes to making decisions, whether it's a purposeful decision or it's being proactive or reactive, the decisions are always being made off of the goals or her vision. I think that is strength. I don't think people question what she is about.

The curriculum director also commented that the superintendent's work with the school board has resulted in the board supporting the initiatives with significant dollars, and most of the board votes in the past five years that the curriculum director has been in the district were votes of 7-0 in favor of district initiatives. The superintendent sees her role as continually educating the board. She feels that the board has been overwhelmingly supportive of the district initiatives because of the information and education they have received.

Knowledge building for excellence and equity. Developing relationships with staff and making them feel like part of the process was critical in getting the staff to accept the vision and the need to make changes. The superintendent in Oakwood School District worked in a different capacity in the district before she became the superintendent, so many relationships had already been built, and the foundation for the vision was already in place. Staff development was a key next step of continuing to build a knowledge base to secure the vision of the district. The curriculum director shared an example of the importance of staff development in moving the district forward:

> What is significant about professional development with regards to RtI [Response to Intervention] is that it is all 110 teachers getting the same experience. It's not just pockets of teachers and then we expect them to come back and be leaders…. All 110 heard the message, so we have a common understanding and common expectations.

RtI is a method of preventing failure in school through strong research-based classroom instruction, screening and monitoring progress of students in relation to academic goals, and intervention as soon as the student is not understanding a concept rather than waiting for a summative exam or retention. The staff was also given opportunities to be part of a consortium for RtI with other districts, attend classes for ELL instruction, be part of learning book groups, and participate in many other internal and external staff development opportunities. The focus of all staff development is related to the vision of the district to serve all students. A principal describes the planning process for professional development:

> We have a lot of time for professional development here. I'm given a certain amount of time to work with my staff and push them forward. We set some priorities at the beginning of the year and set up some action teams around those priorities, and we have

> teachers who are working on defining what our next steps are and providing professional development to the rest of the staff to push us forward in areas like grading, positive behavior expectations, literacy across the content areas, etc.

Principals and staff also seem to respect Superintendent Gable's incredible knowledge base. Over and over, teachers and principals described the superintendent as incredibly knowledgeable. The superintendent led many of the professional development opportunities and introduced to staff topics such as deficit thinking. A principal described the superintendent's leadership with professional development: "We often did district wide staff development in terms with the Response to Intervention model, but I remember her kicking it off with the Deficit Thinking model." Dr. Gable had already set the stage for her view about deficit thinking by sitting in on every IEP meeting during her first year to discuss with teachers how students can be served without having to be identified as a student with a disability. The Response to Intervention model following the introduction to deficit thinking provided a framework for what she had been teaching through her modeling all along—that when the district used the RtI model of strong classroom instruction and using data and progress monitoring to provide interventions as needed, students no longer needed to have a special education label to receive services in the district.

Dr. Gable's background and knowledge were a key piece in the planning and delivery of professional development in the district. The special education director/principal described the superintendent's background knowledge as extensive in numerous areas. She explained that Gable reviewed all of the special education paperwork and questioned things that were not clear. The superintendent also looked at the IEPs through the legal lens to make sure that the laws were being followed. The special education director relied on Gable's expertise, and,

although she was in awe of Gable's knowledge, she trusted her and felt comfortable asking for guidance.

> She's very, very meticulous. Every *T* is crossed—every *I* dotted, which is great. We hold monthly special education meetings and she's open to coming to those when needed to really either reinforce something or to provide us with additional information in any specific area. I think she just comes with such a wealth of knowledge in so many, many areas.... If we are struggling writing behavioral goals, I feel very confident that she is still knowledgeable—has current knowledge on how to do it the right way. I think that helps us because she comes with so much expertise in so many different areas and is so current in her knowledge base. Sometimes I feel like I know nothing after talking to her. I stumble over and over, and she is so articulate and can say it perfectly.

A teacher described the professional development process as one where speakers were brought in and discussions began to happen in the district to bring people along to the idea of "it's not just the intervention people's problem, it's what can we do in the classroom to meet these kids' needs." She described the superintendent as the visionary behind all of the changes.

Coherence making. The vision of all students being successful is carried out mainly under the umbrella of Response to Intervention. Oakwood School District has had training and professional development in RtI and related areas, such as best practices in core instruction, how to serve ELL students, how to best serve special education students, and how to use data. Teachers were trained in literacy and math. They were also trained in inclusionary practices. A focus was to keep students in the classroom by providing regular interventions to keep students on track for the regular and more rigorous curriculum. A teacher described the process of using

RtI to collect data and make decisions on curriculum and best practices in the district as follows:

> It started—in the beginning, especially with RTI—it started with creating action teams on a building level. [We started with literacy]; then we were discussing it during staff meetings. From there it turned into districtwide action teams that started out working together and collecting data discussing whatever we were bringing to the table, and that's kind of a model we use for everything. If we are looking at curriculum materials or changing any sort of program, we go through that process. I think then asking us to report out about what went on and how we came to those findings in staff meetings, and then we also did team-level meetings where, as a fourth-grade teacher, our whole fourth grade would meet, and in that meeting we would be talking to the director of curriculum and our principal and really having people remind us of what the bigger picture is and getting into detail about what's working and what isn't and addressing those things that we need to change.

The teacher thought that these discussions that led to interventions for students had a big impact on the improvement the district was seeing.

The curriculum director described a specific professional development opportunity around teaching ELL students.

> We have been purposeful in learning…like our Early Learning Center did a book group on *What Works with English Language Learners*--the Marzano information. They did a book study for a whole year on that. We had [a trainer] from the [nearby large university town] come and spend a year with that staff, too, because that's where we have a majority of our population right now. She came three times throughout the

course of the year to help them understand proficiency levels, and how does that impact our instruction. She was strictly ELL instruction.

In Oakwood School District, it did not matter whether a student was ELL, labeled as special education, or homeless. The expectation from the superintendent was to make sure all children were learning at their capacity and that all children were served without being required to have a label. The district heavily used data to determine what children needed. Within the district's RtI model, there are intervention times when students are flexibly grouped in both literacy and math so all students got what they needed at their own instructional level. Groups were changed on a regular basis (every four to six weeks). The students were grouped based on the data collected, student assessments, and teacher discussions during their Professional Learning Community (PLC) time. During PLC time, the teachers looked at assessments such as running records and other teacher-developed common assessments as well as math common assessments to determine needed interventions. Interventions were given to students based on their skill, not whether they were labeled as ELL or special education or any other real or perceived label. The curriculum director summarized the intervention process as follows:

> [What is significant is] just the way we look at intervening for *any* kids struggling…they are not treated as a separate population…ELLs are not treated separately with our Response to Intervention framework. I think that is significant, because when we do our interventions it's based on skills, it's not based on who they are. When they do their intervention time here, you might see a bilingual teacher working with maybe a majority of ELLs, but they also might be working with other kids who need the same skill set. And vice versa. You might have a reading teacher

> working with a large chunk of ELLs—as long as it's based on the skill that they're working on at that time, they get that kind of support. That's what I think is making a difference.

The curriculum director was hired by the superintendent to focus on making the improvements, especially in reading and math. Curriculum teams worked on, and continued to refine, the core instruction to meet the needs of all students. The curriculum director led a balanced literacy initiative with training in-district provided by reading certified teachers who were teaching in the district. The curriculum director said that the district had "no specific instructional materials" (textbooks) that were used for reading, because she wanted the process of teaching reading to be the focus rather than the textbook. The teachers did have some support resource materials for writing and comprehension, but they did not have a spelling text. They used a "framework of instruction" to teach spelling. When the curriculum director began in the district, shortly after the superintendent, she also worked with the teachers on a math adoption. They switched from a traditional math series to a National Science Foundation–funded math program, and the curriculum director commented, "The scores went up significantly after the change in math materials."

The superintendent described the need for continuous focus on core instruction. "We needed to create an understanding that curriculum is living, breathing, and evolving always and forever, and we will never be done." A principal described how the curriculum director was given the directive to lead the RtI initiative.

> When it came to the RtI work, [the superintendent] came to [the curriculum director] and said, "This will be a general education curriculum initiative." I feel like that was a huge directive—a good direction and a huge thing because so many schools address it

> from the special ed direction and because [the curriculum director] took it on as a general [education initiative] and [because] 80% of [the initiative was about] core curriculum, meaning that 80% just made it owned by everybody. That was a huge and great step of [the superintendent] just to think that way. She could have easily led it. I know she could—in the other direction. I wouldn't have thought of that. I was impressed that she thought that way. Then [the superintendent] spoke to the general staff…I mean the whole staff [about RtI] kicking off the year.

The superintendent explained that her focus was to get all students access to rigorous curriculum, such as Advanced Placement (AP) classes and higher-level math and reading—especially at the middle and high school levels, where barriers to higher-level courses are harder to break down.

> I think that historically there may have been a culture of low expectations [for students with disabilities and ELL students]. I would say that was true of all of our kids, by the way. We would have our general education staff even for our general education kids say "Our kids can't do that." Well, if we believe they can't do that, they probably won't. I would say that there was a culture of low expectations. [There were] oodles of specially designed classes for kids who were [in] special education because they couldn't be in regular whatever-it-was…. That, too, has been a shift of looking at general education first to the extent that it is both appropriate and meets the needs of kids that they do have exposure to a rigorous course of study and curriculum.

Additionally, courses designed for special education students were taken out of the curriculum, and special education and ELL teachers were put in the classroom for support so the students could receive services with a more rigorous classroom curriculum rather than in

the lower-level classes created for special education. An emphasis was placed on removing barriers at the high school for AP courses, and at the elementary level, a focus was on creating intervention times and training in interventions and data. This intervention process kept students on track for learning the more rigorous classroom curriculum.

The superintendent assured access to students through monitoring IEPs, having ongoing discussions with administrative staff, and providing professional development to assure students access to high-quality curriculum. A teacher described the process the superintendent went through as "a focus on undoing deficit thinking and looking at the criteria for identifying and labeling students." At the same time, Gable made it possible to provide what children needed without them having to be labeled. The same teacher said, "What are we all going to do to make sure that this child is going to be guaranteed the curriculum and get what they need so they can achieve and show greater growth than what we've seen in the past?" RtI connects almost all of the initiatives and pulled all of them together in what seemed like one cohesive initiative rather than several disconnected initiatives. Oakwood School District has been asked by the state department of education to make presentations on its RtI model because of the district's success in implementation.

Oakwood School District, as part of the RtI process, uses an online assessment system called Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) to assess student learning and other screeners and internal assessment tools to monitor student data and progress. The teachers use PLC time to look at the student data to identify strengths and weaknesses and student needs. The elementary buildings have time for intervention, when students are flexibly grouped according to their skills and taught at their level, whether it is high, low, or average. Some students get a double dose of reading and some of math. The superintendent believed that empowering

teachers to use data required a significant amount of training, but it was worth the effort. Gable explained:

> I guess another thing that I would say is important [in the development of our district] is the growth of teachers in both having a desire to collect data…collecting the data, interpreting the data and using the data to make educational decisions for kids on an individual basis or on a whole class basis. [Teachers are] being purposeful in planning assessment and using that data—and not just the state assessment, but other points of data. I think our teachers have also become skilled in looking at multiple sources of data, or using triangulation to make decisions. That's really important.

One teacher saw the RtI strategies as a large part of the data collection process. Her comments were echoed by all of the interview participants:

> We are such a data-driven school district, so I use a lot of data to find out where [my students] are at and guide my instruction using that data. We were really early to get into the RtI process. I feel like that has had a huge impact on both ELL and special education students, and that has been driven by the administrators who really investigated it, got on the ball and implemented excellent RtI strategies.

The superintendent implemented the RtI process in the district before most other districts in the area, and she used it to bring coherence to the initiatives around her vision of excellence and equity. RtI changed the way teachers used and looked at data, provided services to students, and taught in the classroom. RtI also provided the framework for updating core instruction, interventions, and the professional development needed to make it all happen.

Social Justice Leadership

Social justice is advanced by using practices that create more inclusive environments for students; build professionalism and the skills necessary to address issues such as poverty, race, and equity; create a more connected school community and climate; and produce more equitable student achievement (Theoharis, 2010). The superintendent in Oakwood School District has the core belief that all students can learn, and she carries that vision in all that she does in the district. The superintendent spoke about the expectations that teachers in the district need to be able to work with *all* children.

> I think it's about setting expectations for our teachers. The expectation is that if you're going to be a teacher in our district, then we are going to expect that you have the ability to work with all children in general education. And that is really our first choice, even as children need supports or interventions, the first choice of delivery—which was a very significant shift in our district because it was very much the pullout model.
>
> I think we've [also] done work through changing attitudes of our teachers, doing some education of differences, and doing some work on appreciating diversity in that we are richer because we are diverse rather than that being a divisive issue.

The superintendent, through her actions and words, supported the moral purpose of all students needing equity and excellence. As demonstrated, she built knowledge and professionalism around that moral purpose or vision, and she created a more connected school and community. Although inclusive environments were not specifically targeted, they were definitely a goal and a result of the RtI work and the improved identification of students.

Create Inclusive Environments

The superintendent has implemented inclusive practices. Gable's goal was to serve all students in the best way with or without a label. Under her leadership, the district shifted from a mentality of "my kids" and "your kids" to one of "our kids." She stated:

> I think I have leveraged influence to encourage and support collaboration. I think that that is an area that has improved significantly as well. So the cooperative work between a general education teacher and let's say a special education teacher or our bilingual staff…I think our kids are the beneficiaries of that. That again was a shift of "they are your kids, you do that in your little room down the hallway where all those magical things happen." That has been a shift.

A teacher described the change in environment as well.

> I really feel like when I first started here it was like, "these are your students and these are mine," and now I feel like it's more of a team approach where these students are everyone's. "What are we all going to do to make sure that this child is going to be guaranteed the curriculum and get what they need so they can achieve and show greater growth than what we've seen in the past?"

In addition to the culture change around serving SwD and ELLs in ways other than just pullout or specially designed classes, the superintendent hired trainers to work with the staff on RtI, inclusionary practices, instructional practices, and interventions. Dr. Gable also put a focus on creating time for collaboration and professional learning. The regular education teachers, special education teachers, and ELL teachers became a team of professionals working with children as opposed to being separate entities serving children without connecting to each other.

Summary

Over six years, the superintendent of Oakwood School District has led the district through a series of changes described by one principal as “the perfect storm.” The moral purpose or vision of equity and excellence for all students began, surrounded, and infiltrated the change process. The changes began with the hiring of new administrative staff and were followed by creating the culture, supports, and knowledge necessary to make the vision a reality. To imbue the changes with meaning, the umbrella of RtI and the moral purpose guided every step of the process. RtI was the structural model, and excellence and equity was the core that drove everything in the model. Every decision and every change led the district closer to excellence and equity.

The moral purpose of excellence and equity was not named social justice at any point, but the driving force behind the changes all related to social justice. Superintendent Gable led the district in changing deficit thinking, developing the knowledge around inclusion and RtI, and changing the district’s belief that “the kids can’t do it” to a mind-set of high expectations for all students. The superintendent helped the school board and community to understand the vision and purpose. She worked to create environments that did not require students to be labeled to receive services, and she worked to make sure students were getting what they needed no matter what the need. The focus was on students, not on what label the student had or did not have. She worked for rigor, access, and equitable achievement for all students. She also provided the resources, professional development, and support that opened the path for change that led to success in raising student achievement.

Dr. Gable’s work in Oakwood was largely consistent with both leadership for change and leadership for social justice, both to be discussed more in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7. Similar

findings are discussed next for Gateway School District. I will address the intersections of the two leadership frameworks in Chapter 6 and findings about the study in Chapter 7.

Chapter 5

Gateway School District: Excellence for Every Individual

Demographics and Location

Gateway School District, located about 10 miles from a major metropolitan city, is a rural Midwest district in a community that is slowly becoming more suburban. The community has a population of about 10,500 people, and the district has a total enrollment of about 4,900 students. The population of the city has increased 50% since 2000. The district's student population is 70% White, 13% Hispanic, 10% Black, 4% Asian, and a small number of other ethnic groups. Over 28% of the students in the district are considered economically disadvantaged, and 11% of the students are students with disabilities. In the last 10 years, the Hispanic population has increased from 3% to 13%; the percentage of economically disadvantaged students has increased from 11% to over 28%; and the population of students with disabilities has remained fairly steady at around 11%. The Gateway School District has reduced the percentage of students with disabilities under the leadership of a former special education director, and, according to administrators who were in the district at that time, a culture of inclusion and properly identifying students has remained in the district since the service of the former special education director. The district houses four elementary buildings, two middle schools, a high school, and three charter schools. The schools and student population are spread out across the district, with some students living across a major highway in a suburban area and other students coming from more rural areas.

I identified the Gateway School District for my study based on the level of student achievement in the district being above the state average for all students in reading and math for the years 2005-2006 to 2009-2010 and on the recommendation from the state department of

education that the district had superintendent leadership that made a difference in achievement for ELLs and SwD. In addition, the district had high achievement for ELLs and students with disabilities compared to the state average in reading and math. Students identified as ELLs also met growth measures for all of the years listed above (see Chapter 3).

Superintendent Larson and the Administrative Team

The current superintendent, Dr. Murray Larson, has been in the position for six years. The administrative team includes the superintendent, a curriculum director, a community relations director who is in charge of the ELL programming, a special education director, a human resources director, four elementary principals, three charter school principals, two middle school principals, and a high school principal. Dr. Larson has a strong commitment to serving all students in ways that meet their individual needs. He led the district through tough discussions, pushing at times, holding his leaders accountable, and by getting to know them on a personal level and trusting them to be leaders. Dr. Larson described his vision of distributed leadership.

> I am very respectful and cognizant of the power in dissemination [of leadership]. If I am the only one beating that drum, I am the only one beating that drum. Does it go very far? And I think a lot of superintendents, a lot of people leadership just kind of take it from, well I have to be the brightest bulb here, I mean I have to be the loudest drum, the loudest horn, whatever I have to be. If I use a bulb, I have to be this 10,000-watt bulb and I will shine the light on all for all to see. That's silly, because you don't want to hang out next to those people, because you get burned, I mean they just burn hot and they burn out and they burn you out. I really look at it as I just need to be enough light at the right time at the right place. And then let others be that light.

Leadership for Change

Moral purpose. In the Gateway School District, the moral purpose of excellence and equity for *all* children has been the culture for many years and continues with the current superintendent. Dr. Larson's vision and his passion for meeting individual needs of students carries the district forward as it continues to improve what has been done in the past. This commitment to serving all students permeates the administrative leadership team. The curriculum director, one of the newer members of the administrative team, commented about the superintendent's vision: "[His vision is] very consistent. The focus [is] on innovation and personalization for kids...meeting the needs of kids who are not successful in the school system as we know it."

A principal agreed that the district placed value on individual students and their needs; yet there was also a value for diversity, and the district went to extra lengths to make sure that the buildings were diverse and not segregated by strategically placing boundary lines for buildings.

> We do try to keep those demographics as balanced as we can. So that's been a priority, and that started before [the superintendent] but has continued. [The current superintendent] also recognizes that as a priority and a good thing for all our schools to be diverse.

Another principal supported the fact that, although the culture of excellence and equity began before the current superintendent was hired, he certainly holds the same vision and continues to push the administrative team even further to consider *individual* student needs.

> I think that his passion is—[the superintendent] is not one that likes conformity, uniformity, standardization. [He] really wants us and is pushing us…I mean that in a

> positive way…really pushing us to look at individual needs and to look at what are we doing to acknowledge that all kids are different and all kids have strengths and what are we doing to build on those. [He is] really pushing us as a district to accept that and to embrace it and move forward with it.

The vision of meeting individual student needs is carried through to hiring and getting the right people in the right positions who have the same vision. A principal talked about how critical it is to sustain the vision even in the hiring process.

> Again, [the culture of excellence and equity] is a part of who we are and what we do. And I know at the building level, when we are hiring, we are looking for people who share that same philosophy. And so I guess I would say it's because many of us have that philosophy that that's what keeps it going.

Hiring people with a moral purpose that includes compassion and opportunity for all students has been a focus of the superintendent. He described hiring people as one of his most important jobs: "A very important role for me is hiring really good people to do the work and then trusting them to do it and it's a lot about trusting them to do it." Larson also explained that part of his hiring process includes the first question, "From where do you lead?" He wants administrators who lead from their heart, not from a position of power or a position of title. He is not interested in hiring people who do not let things bother them or who have become hardened to the world. He explains this by saying, "So how do you lead with your heart, how can you lead from compassion...from a position of compassion, if nothing gets to you?" The superintendent reiterated this point and explained the reason behind needing leaders to lead from a place of compassion:

> If you lead from a position of compassion and you understand that denying opportunity [now] has a very real likelihood of denying opportunity in the future, then you are going to do everything to avoid that.... Our duty is to do everything in our power, everything within our resources to help [*all* of our students], to give them as much of a boost as possible and always from the position of compassion.

Aligning the culture and supports with the moral purpose. From hiring the right people to creating a culture of high expectations, every decision made by Superintendent Larson at Gateway focused on the ultimate goal of every individual student achieving. He fostered relationships in a way that developed an atmosphere of trust, high expectations, and accountability. He set up regular, biweekly, one-on-one meetings with everyone on the administrative team. He led his administrative team by building shared knowledge through discussions and professional development, use of data, and leadership activities. The leadership activities he led at administrative meetings always revolved around the vision of serving student needs. Typically he would look at student data or develop leadership around serving all students. He also developed relationships with staff, the community, and the school board.

The administrative leadership team at Gateway School District demonstrated a genuine atmosphere of trust, camaraderie, and respect, yet they were not afraid to have difficult conversations. One of the principals described the superintendent's leadership as accountability with the freedom to make decisions. "He *doesn't* micromanage the sites. Are you accountable? You bet!! Can you do things that fit the needs of your school? Yes." He gave an example of the accountability to serving students.

> [The superintendent] has counseled me along the way...probably sometimes being very strong with [his] council, "I need you to do this," "I want that kind of thing to happen."

> Other times being able to say, “Bring me thoughts, advice, direction, comment.” Sometimes it would be hard conversation; it would be like, “I don’t want to go that direction, justify why you are”—and we would have some of those really hard conversations. Other times I felt like it was supportive and helpful. So all along the way, we have had conversation, and sometimes it’s been clear where he wanted it to go; sometimes he has been able to say, “Bring me some idea and direction,” and we will go there too. So he has, I think, had a big view of it but has also been willing and open to say, “I want to hear your ideas and where you are going to take it,” and “I may have a perspective on it, I may disagree with it, but I want to hear your ideas and where you are going with it.”

The same administrator described a time when a proposal was being implemented, and the superintendent wanted to see the data about whether it was working. The administrator explained to the superintendent that he could not get valid data so early in the proposal and then explained how and when he would gather the data needed at a later time. Rather than being upset with the superintendent for asking him to produce data so early in the project, the administrator appreciated that the superintendent was holding him accountable to showing that the changes affected student achievement. “It’s accountability with respect. That’s the way to be able to say it. And there [have been] times where it’s like, ‘I don’t know, I can't answer that.’ But yet, it was like ‘We will try.’”

Data is a major focus and part of the process of accountability to students at Gateway. The superintendent keeps a close eye on programs and data from all of the buildings. An elementary principal gave an example of how the superintendent uses data constantly and asks for data as part of the culture of accountability.

> A week ago today he sent me an e-mail about our [state test] third-grade test results because they were recently released internally. They weren't posted out yet. He saw them and he said, "Wow, did you see what I saw?" Yes, I did, and he said, "Can you provide me a table that addresses things like, who are the kids that got basic or minimal? Who was their second-grade teacher? Any identification you can give them like free and reduced lunch, special education, ESL, ELL?" ...So that's one way that he holds people accountable. Helping us remember—look at your data and what are you doing.

One of the main ways the superintendent leads the district is by working with the administrative team. He guides his leadership team partly through regular administrative team meetings. All administrators commented about his leadership at the administrative meetings. One of the administrators described the importance of these meetings and how the superintendent works with and leads the team.

> [The superintendent] really tries to engage us in conversation and really push our thinking and questions why are we doing things. We don't have to do things, we shouldn't do things just because that's how we have always done it. So really getting us as leaders, and then having us carry that [idea so it will] flow back to our buildings [by] looking at what are we doing, why are we doing it, who is benefiting from it, and is it worth continuing, and if not, get rid of it, and let's find what is working, and how can we improve. And I think he does that again with us as an administrative team through different activities and readings that he has us do and discussions that he engages us in. And he will frequently bring our own data. It might be behavioral data, student assessment data, that type of thing to the admin team and have us take a look at it and

> raise some very reflective questions on it. And he so takes those opportunities to, in my opinion, get us moving forward.

The curriculum director, who was new to the district in 2010-2011, also described the leadership of the superintendent as very influential in the overall guidance of the administrative team. She described the leadership team meetings as an important venue for discussions about leadership led by the superintendent.

> We meet every other week for three hours, and every single meeting that we have been involved in, we have had leadership activity, and so it may be on the diversity issue, it may be [not scoring] very well on the test scores since our test scores dropped a little bit this year. So he plays a key role in staff development of the leadership team, and that is really unique. I haven't seen anyone as strong as [the superintendent] is in the area of developing leadership in his administrative team. I have not seen that in any other district that I have worked in. That's kind of refreshing.

In an administrative meeting that I observed, the superintendent had the team work in small groups to decide what they would do if they received a 10% budget allocation increase. The administrators were well aware that the budget increase scenario was hypothetical, but the teams developed lists of potential budget items that were compiled and discussed with the large group. After compiling the lists, the superintendent asked the administrators to reflect on recent professional development. The professional development focused on how schools need to change in order to survive and improve. Schools of the future, to better meet student needs, should make decisions based on where they want to be and no longer support things that do not work. The teams then talked about which items on their wish lists supported schools of the past and which ones supported schools of the future. This theme carried throughout the meeting.

The team had critical conversations about summer school, grants, budgets, and scheduling—all while openly challenging each other and asking each other critical questions in a respectful way. For example, at one point, a principal began to discuss a decision to offer a remedial math summer school program. Administrators asked her questions about this decision, and the superintendent challenged her, “I want you to think about whether this supports a math program that isn’t working. Then are we making kids repeat the same thing that didn’t work during the year over the summer?” The superintendent sensed a little defensiveness from the principal, so he reassured her that the administrative team’s questions were just to make her think.

In addition to the budget scenario the superintendent led the administrative team through, they also looked at data of students who had been in the district since kindergarten and had scored minimal or basic on the 10th-grade reading test. The superintendent asked the administrators to generate questions about the students on the list. The administrators generated questions about the student demographics, their programming, and the series of teachers and classes and interventions they were offered. To generate thinking from the group, Dr. Larson asked questions throughout the discussion such as, “Should it make a difference what their demographics are?” The administrators had some deep discussions about why students who had been in the district from kindergarten through 10th grade would still not be proficient readers. The superintendent agreed to collect the requested data that the group wanted to disaggregate and decided to continue the data discussion at a future meeting.

Despite the fact that the culture of excellence and equity and the imperative of doing what is best for students have been in place in Gateway for many years, Superintendent Larson

continues to challenge the administrators to be better. Two district-level administrators described their perception of the culture as being very positive. As one stated,

> Teachers understand that when you refer a student to special ed, that doesn't mean that they're going to go someplace else. It just means that you may be receiving some more supports to have that child in your classroom. It is a culture of this district. That's just the way we are.

The second administrator put it this way:

> [Our administrative team has] genuine concern and care for each other, and it does feel very genuine. Like I can walk into [another principal's] building, talk with her about a site council issue, talk with her about her personal life, how is your daughter and what's she doing, I mean all of that—it's the same level of conversation. It's not like I have to go, look her up and say, "Oh, that's right, she's got a daughter so I better mention that once a year," it's nothing, it's real conversation. And it feels good to be able to know that you can struggle with people. You can sometimes bleed together when you have to do cuts, and it's just really hard stuff. But yet, at the end of the day, you can say we are all in it for the same reason. We didn't give our lives to public school because we are going to all try to get rich here. It's about kids and relationships and what we do for each other. And it's very real. So it's a healthy place.

Developing relationships. The superintendent made very specific efforts to build relationships with the leadership team, the staff, the community, and the school board. He held biweekly meetings with each administrator to give the administrator a chance to discuss issues or to use the time as a chance for the administrator and the superintendent to get to know each other. The administrative team expressed appreciation for this chance to have individual conversations with Larson. An administrator explained it as follows:

> He also does a good job at coming out to the schools. Once every two weeks he has—it's called Tuesday's with [Murray]. He takes all the administrators, divides them in half, and every other Tuesday he sees you. So he's here every other Tuesday morning, twenty minutes...I guess, checking in what's going on, what do I need to know, what's going on with you, how are you doing, what's bubbling up that you want to share with me? I think that that would just speak to just his interest in keeping his pulse on the district. What are people talking about? What kind of employee issues and concerns are bubbling up? How is it going?

Another administrator commented on how the meetings helped the superintendent to have a much better understanding of her as a person. She said that many times the meetings were not about educational issues; rather, they were about the superintendent getting to know her better. She commented about how she felt as though he really listened and took the time to know her as a person as well as an administrator.

> [The superintendent] is like a parent. He holds me accountable and challenges me to do better, but he also supports me. He knows me a lot better than I have gotten to know him, but that is okay. It is like he keeps a safe distance…like a parent.

A district-level administrator described how the relationship building led and modeled by the superintendent has a positive effect on the administrative team and the way they deal openly with each other and are able to have critical conversations. All of the administrators agreed that the administrative team was able to struggle through tough conversations about budget, students, staffing, and other critical topics and were able to openly debate and come to solutions while keeping the vision of the district at the center of the conversation. The curriculum director shared that a yearly retreat where the administrative team discusses their "collective commitments to each other" also helped to create the cohesiveness in the administrative team.

A building principal agreed that the superintendent encourages, pushes, and challenges them as well as helps them to create a trusting team atmosphere.

> We meet very regularly. We have retreats. We build on each other's strengths. We support each other. And I think a lot of that is encouraged by the agendas, by what we do at our retreats. [The superintendent] gives us the latitude to take risks ourselves and that if we fail on something it's okay. He is there if we need him. He doesn't necessarily always agree with the decisions that are made at site council or things like that. And you know and I know that that's a challenge. But he will stand behind us if we need that.

The superintendent also makes a commitment to communicate with community members and school board members. Several administrators saw the board support as a real key to success in the district. All of the administrators described how the relationship with the board is a key piece in keeping the district moving in a positive direction. The community

relations director described the importance of Dr. Larson's relationship with the board as follows:

> Where I would give [the superintendent] credit and one thing that I didn't mention is in a leadership role in what he does with our board. I think that sometimes that goes unspoken, and it's *hugely* significant.... I think, again, to [the superintendent's] credit here, he has been able to establish a relationship with the board members to say, "You do *this*; *this* is the policy level that you're working at. If you have a question, take it to *me*. I will research it with my administrators, I'll bring it back, and I'll share it with you." He's been, I think, a fair buffer from that.

Another long-time administrator described how critical it is to maintain that relationship with the school board and how the board's support is critical to the district.

> We have built-in traditions that I think have helped the district build relationships. It actually begins with the school board. The school board, my experience in the 12 years I have been here, is that the school board members have worked, again, very collaboratively with the administration and with the sites.... Now, there have been some bumps in the road over the 12 years that I have been here, but overall, the school boards have really supported [the] management and put a lot of trust and faith in their administrative team and in their staff.

A critical test of the moral purpose and relationships. The superintendent described a time when the district was changing programming for ELL students. The ELL students, separated in their programming from other students, had a track of classes up through middle school that included the same content as regular classes but were taught in two languages. The ELL students were being taught in English and Spanish. The superintendent asked a committee to determine how the programming should change, if at all. Larson did not think this program was best for ELL students because of the nature of the program being separate but equal, with no opportunity in the classroom for the ELL students and other students to develop relationships. He chose to address this issue, even knowing that he would have to fight the Spanish-speaking community if changes were made. Acknowledging the change process, he said he would not force the change if the committee did not believe that this was the time to do it. He would support whatever decision the committee made. The superintendent spoke about the process that he went through to revise the ELL programming and how it needed to be an ongoing process with the board so that they were informed over a period of time.

> There was a committee that had been set up that had worked for months to study the issue, and we had some key board members on there. And they gave many reports back to the full board, so it didn't happen just at one board meeting; it happened over the course of months.

Dr. Larson's belief was that the program was separate but and that it created a divide between ELL students and other students. The ELL students were taught the same curriculum, but separated in the middle school from non-ELL students for all of their classes in order to teach them in both Spanish and English. He also had an issue with the fact that students were being put into the program who had English as their second language but languages other than

Spanish as their first language. These students were at an even bigger disadvantage because they were now in courses using *two* languages they did not understand. There was a lot of push-back from the community about this change, but community meetings were held to help community members to understand the issues. The administrator who coordinates ELL described the anxiety this change caused in the community.

> [There were] a number of people upset in the community. There was a lot of mudslinging that happened. There was some false information put out, false information stated on the local Spanish radio station in [a nearby metropolitan city] from some of our teachers or parents or people who were thinking they were going to do away with the program. And so it caused some parents to be anxious and 50 people at a board meeting, that kind of stuff.

Since the school board was educated during the change, when the final vote came to the board to look at alternative and integrated ways to support the ELL population, the board supported the superintendent and administrators despite the fact that some community members still were opposed to the change. Even after the change was put in place, the superintendent continued to update the board and the community. In this situation, the superintendent was determined to look at what he thought was best for ELL students regardless of the beliefs to the contrary in the Spanish-speaking community and among the ELL teachers that the current configuration was the best way to teach ELL students. This was an important incident around inclusion–exclusion and an important one for leadership and social justice. This issue will be discussed again at the end of this chapter. Dr. Larson prepared the board and the committee well for the change and ultimately got their support. In my interviews with the

ELL teachers, they admitted that they were against the changes at the time, but they now agree that the change was needed.

Knowledge Building. The superintendent approached knowledge building in two ways. One is on a district level around cultural change. The other is more classroom focused and includes building common vocabulary and understanding in the district around classroom implementation, such as the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) training the district conducts to implement ELL strategies in all classrooms. I discuss each of these knowledge-building efforts next.

At a district level, the superintendent, in cooperation with the administrative team, plans professional development or knowledge building around the district strategic plan or cultural awareness. This was accomplished through books, speakers, staff meetings, and specific training. The curriculum director gave an example of current district work.

> [A current example is] the work that the district is doing on privilege and bias and stereotyping. That is really integrated into our Title I plan and the need to make sure we are being culturally responsive to all of our kids. I think that plays an incredible role in meeting the needs of kids when we can connect better with their backgrounds and with the parents of those kids.

A teacher commented about the district-level focus:

> The culturally relevant teaching has really forced us districtwide to think about structures we have in place that are White middle-class culture. There is definitely a push districtwide. You will see things, some policies change here or there districtwide, but it is a lot within the schools and how they think about kids.

An example of a more specific classroom focus of professional development is the districtwide training in SIOP (ELL strategies and culturally relevant teaching). As Superintendent Larson moved the district away from the separate ELL programming, he requested that his ELL coordinator research and bring into the district training in strategies that would help all teachers teach ELL students. This is how the district started training teachers in SIOP strategies. The goal of SIOP is to help ELL students to acquire academic knowledge and understanding simultaneously while developing English language proficiency. Administrators and teachers alike felt that the SIOP strategies were some of the most successful professional development strategies implemented in the district. The professional development was districtwide, focused on culturally relevant teaching that was beneficial for all students, followed by coaching and professional learning with other trained teachers, and it replaced a program that was considered to be a segregated program for ELL students. A teacher commented about how the training helped her:

> SIOP does make a big difference. I'm not a SIOP trainer, but I did get a lot of the SIOP training from our ELL staff and some other teachers. At staff meetings, a lot of those strategies have been topics. There is also districtwide staff development and workshops on SIOP that we were required to go to. I think the best piece of SIOP is I worked on teams who were trainers and went to the intense three-day training. And so they *really* help us use the methods and strategies on a day-to-day basis. I think that has made a huge difference. Especially not only for our ELL students, but for some of our students who are living in poverty who may not have the same background experiences. The thing that was interesting is that I don't think it [SIOP] was that radically different than what people knew was good instruction, but it put a lot of structure in place and gave us

a common language with the staff. It gave us a vehicle for continued professional development.

Coherence making. The district knowledge building and professional development relating to cultural change and classroom strategies helped to get teachers and administrators on the same page with beliefs and practices. However, the piece bringing the most coherence to the district seemed to be the strategic plan. The strategic plan seemed to be a real defining point for the superintendent and a chance to make coherent the overall district vision of excellence and equity for each individual child. Out of the strategic plan came three goals. The first goal was to ensure all students acquire skills and knowledge to be successful in a diverse society. Goal two was to dedicate resources in flexible and creative ways to meet individual student needs. Goal three was to integrate technology into all curriculum areas to improve problem-solving abilities.

A teacher described her experience with the strategic plan:

> Because I was a site council member, I probably had a lot more interaction with the superintendent than maybe some other teachers. Our strategic planning process was a *big* turning point for us, because not everyone necessarily engaged in it…but what came out of that process was three goals…. There was a *complete* focus on those three priorities. That drove most of the decisions, and it soon became kind of accepted that we're doing this because it speaks to this priority or it speaks to that priority.

The teacher went on to explain that the superintendent had expectations for each building to create measurable goals around the district goals, and he had very high expectations for how the goals should be written. The teacher discussed the process her building went through to develop Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound (SMART)

goals and how the general expectation was that they should be written to reflect the achievement of 100% of the students. She also described the discussion that resulted around student learning when the goals reflected 100% of students:

> We as individual teachers were responsible for very specific goals that said "100% of students…" and as a team we had to write up a report about whether we did or didn't meet them. The truth is, did we meet 100%? No, but then we had some pretty intense conversations about the kids that didn't meet those goals.

The expectations of the superintendent carried a lot of weight in the buildings. The superintendent did not work directly with buildings on goals, but his expectations reached the buildings through the principals. While the expectations were high, it was clear that the consequences for not meeting goals weren't about punishment. Not all buildings created goals around achievement of 100% of the students, but the superintendent's message of high expectations led to many discussions. A teacher described a conversation the principal in her building had at a staff meeting on building goals after an administrative team meeting.

> "Show me the 10% who aren't going to make it. Do you want to identify those 10% of kids?" That kind of quieted some people. The other side, too, was that there was also [the feeling that], "We've got nothing to lose from not reaching this goal. There is no penalty, there will not be resources withheld, nobody's going to get a bad evaluation." So that was the other discussion.

Social Justice Leadership

Social justice is advanced by using practices that create more inclusive environments for students; build professionalism and the skills necessary to address issues such as poverty, race, and equity; create a more connected school community and climate; and make possible

more equitable student achievement (Theoharis, 2010). Superintendent Larson, of Gateway School District, had the core belief that all students should have their individual learning needs met, and he carried that vision in all that he did in the district. The superintendent did not overtly frame this work as social justice, but social justice was a driving force behind his expectations that *all* children in the district need to be served. Dr. Larson addressed social justice through creating and continuing the culture of inclusiveness for ELLs and SwD; he put race, equity, and diversity at the center of his practice by offering districtwide staff development in these areas; and he helped create more equitable student achievement by addressing separated ELL programming and continually addressing data with the leaders in the district. He was not afraid to address issues of race, culture, or inclusivity when he felt that it was appropriate.

Create inclusive environments. One of the first "injustices" the superintendent addressed in the district was the one of separate but equal programming for ELL students. One of Larson's goals in making the change in ELL programming was to include ELL students with other students in the classroom. While he was willing to postpone the change if the committee decided it was not time to change, he also set the committee up with the leadership to guide the change in a direction that he thought was best. He put the former curriculum director in charge of the committee and met with her between meetings to discuss the progress and get a feel for the willingness of participants to make the change. He also worked with the ELL coordinator to develop another way to address the gap that would exist in ELL programming. This is how the district decided to conduct SIOP training for teachers.

The district was addressing inclusion in other areas as well, including special education. Students referred for special education in the district were served in the classroom far more

than they were pulled out of the classroom for special services. The curriculum director discussed this change.

> We are trying to reduce the number of referrals for special ed. We are being successful at that. Kids are learning. As a matter of fact we're starting to ask ourselves what is so special about special ed, because the kids that are getting these intensive interventions are in one-on-one or in small groups with a very well-educated teacher. If they have to come to special ed, they are probably going to get less than what they are getting.

A principal also supports the fact that it is not the culture in the district to have kids in separate programming.

> We certainly have great special education and ELL programs and programming models where the kids for both classifications—they are in the classroom. There are not a lot of pullouts even for special education students who are severe physical or mental issues. They are in the classroom a lot of the day. That's what we believe in. They belong in the classroom—not in a room somewhere.

Summary

Dr. Larson, the superintendent in Gateway School District, led the district through a series of continuous improvement through methodical changes, and he led the leaders in the district. The moral purpose or vision of equity and excellence for all students as individuals developed from his leadership at the administrative level and from his ability to trust his leaders and let them lead. Larson did not necessarily need to change the district culture, but he needed to grow the culture and maintain what had already been developed. Beginning with a strategic plan and then implementing changes through professional development and leadership of his team, the district worked to maintain excellence and continue to grow.

The superintendent supported the administrative team, developed relationships in and out of the district, and helped the school board and community to understand the vision and purpose. The focus was always on students, and seeing each student as an individual. He provided the leadership, professional development, and support that led to success in raising student achievement. The superintendent certainly seemed to understand change. He read books about change and demonstrated that he knew when something could be pushed, pulled, led, or should be left alone. He also demonstrated his understanding of the needs of ELLs and SwD. While he claimed to make decisions for all individual students no matter what their circumstances, a major focus was to meet the needs of ELLs in a way that was best for students and did not segregate students. He was willing to confront the needs of ELL students even though many factions of the population did not agree with him. While the topic of SwD did not come up in my interviews with Gateway teachers and administrators as often, it may be because the district was doing well with SwD and the culture had been put in place and was maintained to meet the needs of SwD. Superintendent Larson and his administrative team led Gateway with the vision and moral purpose of serving individual students well.

Chapter 6

Cross-Case Analysis

This research began with the question: In rural districts that have been successful in terms of high achievement for all students, what actions do superintendents take to cultivate high achievement for both English language learners and students with disabilities? The cases were analyzed through the lens of change theory and social justice leadership. In this chapter I will look at the components of change theory and the components of social justice leadership to compare the superintendent leadership of the two studied districts to determine whether and to what extent the leadership of the superintendents was consistent or inconsistent with each framework. I will also determine the similarities and differences in the superintendents' leadership styles. Two tables are presented that compare the actions of the superintendents through the frameworks of change theory and social justice.

Change Theory

Fullan (2001) focuses on five key principles that are required by leaders to successfully guide an organization or school district through a process of change: moral purpose, understanding change, developing relationships, knowledge building, and coherence making. According to Fullan (2001), the truly effective leader in a culture of change uses all five principles. For example, a good leader has a strong moral purpose that is shared by the whole organization and leads the organization. However, the leader is also aware that relationships need to be built and maintained in order to make change and that the change needs to be coherent, not just random changes without a purpose. A successful leader for change knows and understands all five principles of change and when to use them. Table 5 summarizes how the key principles in change theory were demonstrated in the Oakwood and Gateway school

districts. Next, I will explain how the key principles of change theory were the same or different in Oakwood and Gateway.

Table 5

Change Theory as Demonstrated in the Oakwood and Gateway School Districts

Fullan Change Theory	Oakwood School District Superintendent Gable	Gateway School District Superintendent Larson
Moral purpose	Excellence and equity for all students	*All* students as individuals have needs met
Understanding change	Leadership was a mix of strategies: authoritative, moving people toward a vision; pacesetting, with high expectations; affiliative, building harmony; coaching people for the future; and democratic, getting buy-in	Leadership was a mix of authoritative, moving people toward a vision; pacesetting, with high expectations; affiliative, building harmony; coaching people for the future; and democratic, getting buy-in
Developing relationships	Develops administrators to work with teacher knowledge, skills, and disposition	Develops administrators to work with teacher knowledge, skills, and disposition
Knowledge building	Districtwide cultural change, classroom intervention	Districtwide cultural change, classroom common understandings
Coherence making	Response to Intervention was the common thread for coherence	The district strategic plan was the common thread for coherence.

Moral purpose. Both superintendents articulated a strong moral purpose of all students achieving with only a slightly different angle. Dr. Gable focused on excellence and equity for all students, while Dr. Larson focused on meeting individual needs of all students and not conforming to the norm of what works for most students. The administrators and teachers I interviewed discussed decisions or direction from the superintendent and spoke of ELL and special education students, but they made it clear that the superintendents' decisions would have been the same for any student. The major focus was the student and meeting the needs of

all students, not just meeting the needs of groups of traditionally marginalized students. However, both superintendents had background and training in social justice leadership, and both districts had clear examples of the needs of traditionally marginalized students being addressed. For example, Gable made a concerted effort to sit in IEP meetings to make sure students were not being incorrectly identified and to educate teachers and administrators about deficit thinking. Larson confronted what he thought was a separate but equal situation in his district with Hispanic English language learners, knowing full well that there would be a lot of resistance from Hispanic families and ELL teachers. Without overtly expressing it, the overall purpose of both superintendents was to serve all students. The decisions made by both superintendents were strongly guided by their moral purpose. Larson and Gable clearly held to their moral purpose as they hired new staff and worked with their leadership teams and school boards. The moral purpose also guided their decisions around staff development and initiatives in the district. In fact, according to all interviewees, the moral purpose was the foundation of almost every decision made by the superintendents, and the moral purpose is what shaped the future direction of the district.

Understanding change. As discussed in Chapter 2, Fullan (2001) references the work of D. Goleman's 2000 *Harvard Business Review* article, "Leadership That Gets Results" in discussing leadership styles. There are six identified leadership styles: coercive, authoritative, affiliative, democratic, pacesetting, and coaching. The four styles that are considered to be effective for change—authoritative, coaching, democratic, and affiliative—were all used in different situations by both superintendents studied. Fullan states that leaders who develop all four of the effective styles have the best climate and performance. Although each superintendent's approaches and strategies were different, their underlying leadership styles

were similar. The main leadership style for both leaders was authoritative (or more appropriately named visionary) leadership. This type of leadership has the main purpose of moving people toward a vision, and both superintendents were clear on this vision, shared leadership, held high expectations for staff to address the vision, held them accountable for progress toward the vision, and importantly also provided support for staff to address the vision. Leadership clearly involves some authority, but the two superintendents' actions reflected authoritative, not authoritarian, leadership. In the cases of the two districts I studied, the vision was achievement for **all** students. At times, but less so, both superintendents also coached people for the future, used a democratic process for getting buy-in, and used approaches that built harmony and bonds by putting people first. In Gateway, Superintendent Larson used a team of people to make decisions about how the ELL programming was going to change, and he got buy-in from the school board and key players by making them stakeholders in the decision. In Oakwood, Superintendent Gable had teams of teachers and administrators working throughout the district on RtI, interventions and professional learning communities. She also met on a regular basis with a group of building representatives, union leaders, and administrators to build relationships and receive their input and feedback. Both superintendents used a good portion of their time to work with, coach, and guide administrators on leadership, on the use of data, and on the vision of excellence and equity or individual student achievement for all. While these styles looked slightly different in each district, the underlying leadership styles were very similar.

Two styles that Fullan determined negatively affect climate and performance were pacesetting and coercive. Pacesetting is when the leader sets high expectations for performance and takes on many innovations in a short time. Usually the leader becomes a front-runner,

taking on innovation after innovation. Both superintendents used this style to a small degree, more in Oakwood than in Gateway because Gateway had a solid culture of student achievement before the superintendent started there. Oakwood did not have the solid achievement background before Gable started working in the district. Both districts have seen a lot of change in the six-year tenure of each superintendent. All participants in Oakwood School District talked about the amount of change that had happened in a short time, with one administrator calling it "the perfect storm." The changes were in multiple curriculum areas, adding interventions, responding differently to ELL and special education students, and the composition of the administrative leadership team. Gateway School District completely changed how ELL students were served in the district and underwent new training for ELL strategies across the district in a relatively short time. There was some mention of teachers feeling overwhelmed, but results from the innovations were quickly seen and the innovations were highly connected to the moral purpose. While both superintendents used pacesetting at times, and the teachers and administrators admitted that there was a lot of stress during times of many changes, the pacesetting had the appearance of urgency around the moral purpose. Because the rapid and comprehensive changes were so closely aligned with the moral purpose and results in student achievement were quickly evident, instead of burning people out, it pulled them together for the good of students. Both superintendents also used other facets of change simultaneously, such as creating the relationships and buy-in necessary to create the changes. The superintendents were both adept at using different leadership styles in different situations as needed to move the moral purpose forward.

Developing relationships. Perhaps more important than leadership styles are the relationships that are created and developed within the work environment. The relationships

are important because change needed to happen—sometimes quickly and sometimes without committees and years of input. This is why the visionary or pacesetting styles of leadership worked in this environment. The relationships that were established allowed staff members, the school board, and the community to trust that the changes that were occurring were closely connected to the moral purpose. People in the organization felt that they were contributing to a higher purpose. They also needed a chance to learn, grow, and collaborate. Fullan (2001) stressed the importance of effective learning communities. Effective learning communities created capacity to get better results. They worked to develop teacher knowledge, skills, and disposition, and ultimately improved student achievement. Ineffective learning communities reinforced bad practices and worked against developing teacher practices. At a district level, the superintendents in both Oakwood and Gateway had time dedicated for staff to work in professional learning communities. They also both worked directly with principals and other members of their administrative teams in ways similar to an effective professional learning community—defined as looking at data as a team, reading and learning together, challenging each other, and using each other's knowledge and skills to develop each other as leaders.

In addition to creating learning communities, Dr. Gable and Dr. Larson both had open-door policies. Both also spent a lot of time in the school buildings throughout the district. Dr. Larson made it a practice to set aside Tuesdays to meet with each administrator for one-on-one discussions. This allowed him to get to know the administrators on a personal level and to get to know their job concerns. Dr. Gable held regular meetings with building and union representatives to discuss any issues in the buildings from their perspective. Both districts also had a strong focus on sharing knowledge across the district. The relationship building, in both districts, extended to the community and to the school board.

Knowledge building. Most districts are not short of knowledge and expertise regarding effective educational practices; it is the transfer and sharing of knowledge within the district that is difficult. Leaders need to find ways to not only change individuals' knowledge; they need to find ways to change the culture around learning and share that learning in the environment. The learning needs to be focused on the moral purpose and shared within the learning community.

In Oakwood, learning happened in many ways. The superintendent addressed cultural issues by using every opportunity at professional development meetings and in IEP meetings to inform teachers about and discuss awareness of deficit thinking and how to change to thinking about students' individual needs and assets instead of their deficits. Superintendent Gable also brought in speakers and supported book groups throughout the district around similar issues. She created a culture of learning and allocated the resources to allow teachers to participate in professional development in many ways, including professional learning communities, book groups, training in and outside of the district, and coaching. All teachers interviewed believed that as long as they had a rationale for what they wanted to learn aligned with district beliefs and practices, they were never turned down for professional development opportunities and they were provided the resources to make changes. A major effort of the professional learning communities was dedicated to looking at student data and using the data to make decisions about interventions.

In Gateway, a high priority was placed on professional learning. The administrative team read books around the culture of change. Each administrative meeting included a learning activity. The activities were sometimes around student data and other times around leadership topics. Teachers had dedicated time every week for professional learning, and the district had a

long history of teachers working in professional learning communities with dedicated release time. The district had book groups and speakers on topics such as privilege, bias, stereotyping, and cultural responsiveness. The district was also in its fourth year of providing SIOP training for teachers throughout the district to instruct them in strategies to use for ELL students. The training was followed up by coaching in the classroom and professional discussions with other colleagues who were using the strategies.

The superintendents in both districts were influential in making sure there was districtwide professional development in areas such as culture, strategic goals, and the philosophy behind how to respond to students and their learning, whether through trainings like SIOP or through RtI. The superintendents in both districts also put a focus on using student data to make decisions and having professional development that related to the district goals.

Coherence making. Oakwood and Gateway developed coherence around their initiatives, but the districts used different focus areas for program coherence. Oakwood used the Response to Intervention initiative, and Gateway used its strategic plan. Fullan (2001) suggests that in complex systems of change, leaders can create "productive disturbances" that lead the people in the organization in the right direction, especially when the disturbances are related to the moral purpose. In Oakwood and Gateway, the superintendents both connected and guided the district in the direction of the moral purpose through the models they used to build coherence.

In Oakwood, the RtI initiative encompassed almost all of the initiatives in the district, and it also was related to the moral purpose of serving all students. It answered the question, "How will we respond when kids are not learning or when they already know what we are teaching?" Teachers' professional learning time—to look at data and plan interventions, to

receive awareness training about deficit thinking, and to receive training on best practices in content areas—related to the RtI model as guided by the state and federal definition. Every person I interviewed in Oakwood mentioned RtI as the guiding force behind what they do.

Gateway underwent a process of strategic planning. Three goals were developed from the strategic plan. The first goal was to ensure all students acquire skills and knowledge to be successful in a diverse society. Goal two was to dedicate resources in flexible and creative ways to meet individual student needs. Goal three was to integrate technology into all curriculum areas to improve problem-solving abilities. In Gateway, the strategic plan goals were closely related to the moral purpose of meeting the individual learning needs of all students. By aligning resources and training in the district to the goals, coherence was created. Because of the expectation to align district and building goals, all staff members were made aware of the district goals and had discussions relating to them. Most of the people I interviewed made mention of the district goals or mentioned doing some activity that related to the district goals.

Social Justice Theory

Theoharis (2010) found in his study of high-achieving schools that adhere to principles of social justice, the leaders used strategies to disrupt the following four types of injustices in their schools:

1. school structures that marginalize, segregate, and impede achievement, such as pullout programs
2. a deprofessionalized teaching staff who could benefit from focused staff development

3. a school climate that needed to be more welcoming to marginalized families and the community

4. disparate student achievement levels.

Table 6 summarizes how the injustices were addressed in the two districts I studied. The table compares the leadership of the superintendents as it relates to social justice. Next, I will explain how the key principles of social justice theory were the same or different in Oakwood and Gateway.

Table 6

How Social Justice Leadership Was Enacted at the Oakwood and Gateway School Districts

Social justice disrupting injustice	Oakwood School District Superintendent Gable	Gateway School District Superintendent Larson
School structures that marginalize, segregate, and impede achievement	Reduced pullout programs, special education identification, and implemented RtI	Eliminated separate but equal ELL programming, district goals to address all students
A deprofessionalized teaching staff who could benefit from focused staff development	Staff development related to RtI strands	Staff development related to the strategic plan
A school climate that needed to be more welcoming to marginalized families and the community	Focus on connections to the community	Worked with community groups and committees, valuing of different cultures, calendars, etc.
Disparate student achievement levels	Addressed achievement for all students	Addressed achievement for all students

School structures. Both superintendents addressed school structures that related specifically to ELLs and special education students. Gable, at Oakwood School District, sat in

on all IEP meetings to address the injustice of having students identified as special education who should not have qualified, or been labeled, as disabled. Under her leadership, the district also moved from a model of pullout and separate instruction to a model that used inclusionary practices as much as possible. Part of this transition involved changing the culture in the district from one where students needed to be identified as special education students in order to be have their needs met to a model consistent with RtI, where students received interventions and instruction at all levels without needing to be identified as having a special education need.

Gateway School District had a strong culture of inclusion—with the exception of the ELL program—before Dr. Larson came to the district. Larson saw the district's ELL programming as discriminatory. The ELL students were in separate bilingual classrooms and were learning the same content, but in both English and Spanish. Dr. Larson believed that the students should be integrated and not separate. Despite what he knew would be a battle with both the teaching staff and ELL parents, he moved to change the ELL programming to make sure that students were integrated for learning, while still addressing the needs of ELL students through professional development for teachers in ELL strategies and maintaining some bilingual programming in kindergarten through third grade.

Professional teaching staff. The staff at Oakwood had many opportunities for professional development. At the district level, the professional development focused on RtI, inclusionary practices, effective teaching practices, and deficit thinking. When the superintendent thought it was important, she would take all district employees to a professional development event or activity or bring in a speaker to address all district employees. Building-level professional development focused more on behavior expectations, grading, and content

area practices such as literacy. The teaching staff I interviewed all agreed that as long as an opportunity for professional development fit within the goals of the district and program, they were allowed to participate. They felt as though their eagerness to continue learning and their knowledge as professionals was honored. The administrative team members were also encouraged to participate in professional development, some of which was done as a group. Professional development was a priority in the district and in the budget. In addition to professional development, the staff was evaluated based on a model of best teaching practices.

Gateway School district also had a professional development focus. At the district level, professional development focused on privilege, poverty, bias, stereotyping, culturally relevant pedagogy, and cultural competence. From a social justice perspective, these programs were very positive because they kept these issues at the forefront of discussions. Although the superintendent did not preach social justice, he was aware of these issues and how they could negatively influence the vision of achievement for all students. Although Gateway had a culture that was reflective of social justice issues as demonstrated by the understanding of how SwD and ELLs should be taught and the culture of inclusion, the superintendent thought that it was necessary to continue to put these issues out for discussion and reflection so the district did not take backward steps in social justice. To address the needs of ELLs, the district underwent a four-year process of training teachers in SIOP (ELL strategies). At their administrative team meetings, the district leaders identified SIOP as one of the most successful strategies they had implemented. The district began to offer this training to assist teachers with ELL strategies after the programming for ELLs was changed. Every person I interviewed in the Gateway School District identified the SIOP training as a model for what they should be doing with professional development. The training identified common language and common strategies

and was followed up with coaching in the classroom and sharing with colleagues. Much of the professional development not done at the district level is based on the need in the building or group of teachers and is based on the building goals. The superintendent led the administrative team in Gateway in professional growth opportunities at all of the administrative meetings using data, speakers, activities—all related to the strategic goals. The continued development of leaders and leadership was a major focus of the superintendent.

Welcoming marginalized families and the community. Superintendent Gable and Oakwood School District have identified key people in the district's Hispanic community to create a bridge between the school and the Hispanic community. Some of the key community members include a business owner, a bilingual teacher, and a district paraprofessional. These community members are trusted by the Hispanic community, and the superintendent and administrative staff use these community members to get a pulse for the Hispanic community, get input, translate, and share information about the district. The district also hosts family nights for the Hispanic population and provides English instruction for Spanish-speaking parents. The Hispanic community uses the two district employees to make connections with teachers and administrators and to access information or get answers to questions about their children or their schooling. The parents use the formal and informal resources provided by the district, and they have trust in the system.

Gateway School District experienced rapidly changing demographics over a short span of time. The district connects to parents with a parent site council at every building. These parents are directly involved in the governance of the school. Like the superintendent's vision of all students having their individual needs met, each building is unique in how it connects to families. The district has an administrative team member whose title is community relations

director. He is also in charge of ELL programming. Principals at Gateway talked to me about the family connections that are made at each building. Gateway is about four times the size of Oakwood, so the communication with families was largely a responsibility of the buildings. A building principal gave an example of a time when an ELL parent had a concern and was not able to get transportation to the district. The principal said that it was common for the district to go to the home of the parent, provide bus tokens, pick up the parent, get a translator, or make other efforts to include these parents. The district also has parent/family nights in each building and parents and staff members who serve as connections to get the pulse of the community.

Disparate student achievement levels. According to Theoharis (2010), increased achievement did not necessarily come about because of specific strategies. It came about because of the other injustices being addressed and the achievement of marginalized students being at the center of every decision that is made in the school.

In Oakwood, Superintendent Gable made every decision based on the best interests of each individual student. There certainly were decisions that were made to address injustices. The best example of this is the fact that Gable attended more than 100 IEP meetings as a new superintendent in the district, and she used that opportunity to educate the teachers about deficit thinking and helped to address the fact that the district was overidentifying special education students. The curriculum director shared how Gable's moral purpose permeated the superintendent's decisions in different areas:

> Honestly, I think she looks when she hires, especially for administration, she looks for people who get [that all students can learn], versus you have to label someone in order to get service, and always putting students first. I think [the superintendent], too, in listening to her talk about our ELL population, she has a lot of compassion for that

> population…. [Also], I think with every professional development that we've done has been everyone together, and it's been focused on changing mind-sets.... It was what was needed, but retrospectively it was about changing mind-set.

Gable's decisions were made based on the moral purpose of equity and excellence. She used the word *equity* with the word *excellence* when she talked about her vision. She made decisions to help students who were traditionally marginalized. However, comments from all of the other administrators indicated that Gable made decisions for students, not just marginalized students. This does not mean that she did not address injustices with traditionally marginalized populations. She absolutely did, and she had marginalized populations in the front of her mind when making decisions. However, her compassion for children with any barriers to learning was evident from all interviews.

At the Gateway School District, Dr. Larson also has a vision of excellence and equity. Although he does not use those exact words, he says:

> My personal vision statement is that all kids are successful, *all* kids…what motivates me is we are human, and we have dreams and aspirations and we have a life to live, we have a story to tell, we have a story to create. And so my motivation, my passion, is around helping kids write that story, no matter what story it ends up being, no matter from what point of view, from what vantage point they have in this life…so is it about equity, sure, but it looks different for everybody, because the success looks different for everybody.

Dr. Larson's focus is on all students, but he does recognize injustices for traditionally marginalized students, and he makes decisions to correct the injustices. In addition to the focus

on changing programming for ELL students, he also has a district focus on cultural diversity. A principal talks about how Larson keeps cultural diversity at the front of educators' minds:

> He is also—as all of our administrative team—he also is helpful putting his energy and time on cultural diversity—making sure that we have in the forefronts of our thinking and our teaching and that we bring great resources and speakers to our district about it—that it is not lost.

Additionally, Dr. Larson credits achievement in Gateway School District to the professional development, the leaders in the district, the leadership they continually work on together, and the strategic plan and goals the district has in place.

Summary and Conclusion

There are a number of similarities and some differences in how each of the superintendents addressed change and social justice. Both superintendents effectively addressed each component of change theory. There were only slight differences in the moral purpose and the vehicle used for creating coherence. Both Gable and Larson had similar leadership styles for understanding change, they both made developing relationships and knowledge building a high priority, and they related everything they did and all decisions to the moral purpose of having all students achieve.

The superintendents also had quite a few differences. While it was clear that they both addressed issues in the framework related to social justice and change, they had somewhat different styles and different ways to address each component. They also had different ways to lead and different ways that they approached leadership.

Gable led her district in a very hands-on way, being in the buildings and classrooms and working with teachers on a very regular basis. Larson was in the buildings and classrooms,

but he led his staff more through the leadership of his administrative team. Gables district was very small, allowing for her hands-on approach. Larson's district was about four times the size of Gable's district. His approach to leading through his leaders was effective for his district.

Both superintendents addressed injustice as they saw it. Gable addressed injustice by immersing herself in the injustice, like when she sat in over 100 IEPs to share knowledge about deficit thinking, keep injustice from happening and meet the injustice head-on and in a hands-on way. Larson addressed the injustice of ELL programming by setting up a committee to determine how the injustice should be addressed. However, he had involvement in the committee by choosing a curriculum director to run it over the ELL coordinator (who he thought was too closely tied to a particular outcome) and discussing the issue with the curriculum director on a regular basis. Although Larson stated that he was willing to let the ELL programming continue if that was the decision of the committee, it was clear that he was not accepting of the injustice he felt was happening to ELL students with the programming he called "separate but equal".

Addressing social justice, both superintendents made decisions—even if the decisions were unpopular—to address injustice and to create more equitable and inclusive environments. Much of this was done through professional development and changing school structures when needed. Both superintendents addressed marginalized families and the community, but in different ways. In the smaller Oakwood district, many of the community relationships were through the superintendent. In the larger Gateway district, the superintendent developed relationships with the community, but he had to rely on the rest of his leadership team to do some of the work, especially at the building level. Finally, Dr. Gable was seen in the district as an all-knowing superintendent. Her knowledge about most topics was vast and she was

consulted even by the special education coordinator about current IEPs. Larson was also very knowledgeable, but his expertise was definitely in the area of leading the leadership team and asking the right questions of the leaders. While the superintendents both effectively addressed change and social justice, they were far from cookie cutters of each other. The concepts they addressed may have been the same, but the approaches were very different. Both superintendents had the end result of showing progress in achievement of ELLs and special education students.

The two theories have a surprising amount of crossover in how they were manifested in the two school districts via the superintendents. The moral purpose played heavily into social justice. Both theories also suggest the importance of relationships with staff and community and of professional development that is meaningful, sustained, and related to a bigger purpose. Both of the superintendents, although very different in personal style, had strong similarities in aligning to change theory and social justice theory. What might have been seen as a weakness in both cases was the number of innovations taken on at once in the districts. Since these innovations were so strongly tied to the moral purpose and the district had coherence with its overall plan, it seems that, while the innovations might have been stressful for the people implementing them, student achievement was moving in a positive direction.

Chapter 7

Findings and Theoretical and Practical Implications

In this chapter, I will review the findings of the study, draw conclusions, and discuss the theoretical and practical implications of the study of two superintendents in successful districts and the effect of their leadership on achievement for English language learners and students with disabilities. First, I will summarize the study and the literature that formed the foundation for this study. Next the findings of the study will be reviewed, and conclusions from the study will be drawn. I will address how the theoretical framework worked for the study and what can be gained from the study as a result of the implications. Finally, I will describe how the findings from the study can be applied to current educational practice. This will result in further recommendations for study in the field of educational research.

This study examined the actions of two superintendents in successful rural districts that showed achievement gains for students who were ELLs and SwD. Currently most research on school district leadership is based on overall student achievement (Waters & Marzano, 2006). The research on the superintendent effect on student achievement is most commonly known through the work of Waters and Marzano (2006), who completed a meta-analysis of district-level leadership to answer the following two questions: “What is the strength of relationship between leadership at the district level and average student achievement in the district?” and “What specific district-level leadership responsibilities are related to student academic achievement?” (p. 7). The measure of achievement that Waters and Marzano used is “average academic achievement at the district level” (p. 4). However, *average* academic achievement can be high in a district without having high achievement for marginalized populations in that district. The question that remained is what the district leaders who are closing the achievement

gap with marginalized populations are doing to get these results. This study focused on leaders in rural districts who showed success with ELLs and SwD. The study looked at the actions the superintendents in those districts took to cultivate high achievement for both of these traditionally marginalized populations.

This qualitative study included case studies of two districts. The districts were chosen based on the recommendations of state education departments, university professors in the area of educational leadership, overall achievement of the district, and achievement of students who were ELLs and SwD. State test data were used in addition to tests specifically designed for ELLs. Both districts also met Annual Yearly Progress goals as identified in No Child Left Behind for the years identified.

The research question that guided the study is as follows: In rural districts that have been successful in terms of high achievement for all students and for ELLs and SwD, what actions do superintendents take that help to cultivate high achievement for both English language learners and students with disabilities? The literature reviewed for this study includes each of the following strands: achievement of ELL students, achievement of students with disabilities, educator beliefs and practices, and the superintendent's role in student achievement. The conceptual framework for the study was a combination of educational change theory, drawing on the work of Fullan (2001), and social justice theory, drawing on Theoharis (2010).

Findings

The research question, literature review, and theoretical framework provided the structure for the study of two superintendents and their actions that led to achievement for ELLs and SwD. The superintendents shared several attributes—most importantly, the moral

purpose of achievement for all students. Achievement for all students could also be considered to be their vision, but moral purpose is a better term for what drove both superintendents, because there was a passion and drive behind the vision that led the district decisions and focused the district on success for all students. Both superintendents framed high achievement for all students as an ethical responsibility. The moral purpose was the fiber that wove through everything that was done in the district, or the lens through which everything was viewed. The moral purpose led the district. The superintendents also shared practices such as hiring the right people, having high expectations, developing relationships, building knowledge and professionalism, using data to monitor student achievement, and creating coherence.

The superintendents were the vision keepers, or moral purpose keepers—making sure that the purpose stayed in the forefront of everything that was done. This made the hiring process in the districts very important. To hire the right people, the superintendents put time and effort into the interview process, making sure that the interview questions would reveal whether the candidate had a vision that fit with the moral purpose. The interview process was not the end of the hiring process. Both superintendents devoted energy to working with and developing leadership in the people who were hired in their district.

From the interview process on, the employees of the districts knew that the expectations were high for them. The tone was set right away. Superintendents in Oakwood and Gateway worked with their administrative teams on student data, knowledge building, and becoming teams of leaders. As leaders in the district, administrators were expected to carry the district vision and goals back to their buildings.

Dr. Gable and Dr. Larson shared their high expectations by developing knowledge and professionalism among staff. The districts placed a heavy emphasis on professional

development. The professional development was ongoing and usually took place in the district (as opposed to the usual approach of sending staff to conferences or workshops). At a district level, teachers and administrators were trained in RtI, awareness of deficit thinking, diversity issues, ELL strategies, and other districtwide initiatives. Each building had goals, and the goals were related to the moral purpose of the district. The schools also had professional development at a building level that was related to their goals.

Additionally, both districts used student data to monitor how they were doing. At Oakwood, the smaller district, the data were discussed about the buildings and students at the administrative level, but the curriculum director also worked a lot with the staff in buildings to use the data for individual students. In Gateway, the larger of the two districts, data were used extensively in administrative meetings and then were taken back to buildings by the principals, who led the staff. The data in Gateway were used at almost every administrative meeting to help administrators to think outside of the box about students and achievement. Once again, the data were always drawn back to the moral purpose of high achievement for all students.

Finally, the superintendents both created coherence with all of the initiatives. Oakwood did this through the RtI initiative, and Gateway created coherence through the district strategic planning process and goal setting. Both processes were tightly aligned with the moral purpose. There was no escaping it!

In addition to specific actions taken, another finding of this study, in the context of social justice theory and educational change theory, is that both superintendents were knowledgeable about social justice as a result of the training they received in their administrative degree classes, and they both demonstrated their knowledge about the change

process. While they did not overtly make social justice or change theory part of their vision, they used that knowledge to lead the district in the direction of the moral purpose.

Fullan (2001) defined authoritative leadership as an effective leadership style that was used to move people toward a vision. The superintendents in this case led their districts in an authoritarian style of leadership, possibly better named a visionary leadership style, combined with other leadership styles as appropriate to move the districts toward their goals. This leadership style kept others in the district focused on the moral purpose and pulled them back to the moral purpose when they started to stray.

The findings of this study indicate that there are several important factors to consider when looking at superintendent actions to create high achievement for ELLs and SwD in a district that is high achieving. The factors found to be most important in this study were: hiring the right people, having high expectations, developing relationships, building knowledge and professionalism, using data to monitor student achievement, and creating coherence—all intricately interwoven with the moral purpose of achievement for *all* students. Additionally, training and background in change and social justice as well as a willingness to use a visionary leadership were similar in both districts.

A few other factors were found to be important, but to a somewhat lesser extent than the factors listed above. Creating trust, creating structures, allocation of resources, and creating a sense of urgency were mentioned as important by a few of the people I interviewed, but they were not as consistently mentioned as important. The ideas of creating a culture and trust developed and were mentioned by interviewees when talking about relationship building and knowledge building. The structures and resources were a result of the strong moral purpose and

of the alignment of programs and resources to support the moral purpose. The sense of urgency seemed to be mentioned most often in connection to high expectations and use of data.

Theoretical Implications

In looking at how the actions of superintendents in small, high-achieving districts impact achievement for ELLs and SwD, I chose the theoretical frameworks of educational change theory and social justice leadership. The reason these frameworks were chosen was that each has been found to address educational inequalities, but neither has been applied directly to superintendent leadership in rural school districts. The two frameworks worked well together because there was crossover in the two theories. Change and social justice leadership complement each other. The two theories in this study were chosen to determine the connection that would exist between them. If a leader could show achievement for typically underachieving populations such as the ones mentioned in social justice theory (and, in this case, ELLs and SwD), would change be a necessary and driving component? My prediction before completing the study was that a district achieving with ELLs and SwD would have a leader who led the district through significant change. In the case of the two districts studied, the change process was continual.

The most notable area of crossover in the theories was in terms of moral purpose. Educational change theory held moral purpose as a major factor in creating change and the moral purpose (although not named moral purpose in social justice theory) of addressing inequities, and excellence in achievement for all students was also an essential element to social justice leadership. The leaders in both districts I studied understood and addressed change, knew when to use the multiple styles of leadership, and led their districts with the clear vision of all students achieving. The other components of both theories were important

supporting factors, but the most instantly recognizable component in the leadership of both superintendents was the strong vision or moral purpose. The vision was the moral purpose of achievement for all students and the motivation behind what every person in the district was hired to do. The moral purpose led the districts. The factors in each part of the framework were aligned very closely in both districts. Even the styles of leadership were very similar. However, the districts were very unique in the implementation of achieving excellence. Oakwood was a much smaller district. The superintendent led through her leadership team, but she was very hands-on in the buildings and with the staff. The superintendent at Gateway led more through his administrative team because of the district being larger. He also spent more time building administrative leadership and district-level capacity. He also met with students and teachers in buildings on a regular basis to get their perspective, but because it was a bigger district, he had to depend more on his leaders.

Both superintendents mostly used visionary leadership, moving people toward a vision, or moral purpose. The vision of both superintendents was so strong that everything they did, every decision they made, had the purpose of achievement for *all* students at the center. I would have expected a leader who had the ability to help achievement of marginalized populations to have a more democratic style of leadership, because I think of social justice leaders as seeking diverse perspectives, and being inclusive of all groups. Both superintendents demonstrated each of these, but they also saw what needed to be done in their respective districts as urgent, and at times needing leadership that pulled people in their district more quickly to the end vision.

The fact that the superintendents were not always democratic is another example of how the frameworks were so complementary. While both leaders were democratic at times, the

moral purpose, or vision, of student achievement for all was such a strong part of everything that was done in the districts. The moral purpose led the district and made the visionary leadership style seem appropriate and effective. *Decisions needed to be made in the interests of students.* In the case of Oakwood, in a short time, the overidentification of SwD was quickly addressed and the culture of deficit thinking was looked at under the magnifying glass as students were going through the process of identification for special services. In Gateway, ELL services were being questioned. Separate but equal services were not okay with the superintendent. At the same time that ELL services were being scrutinized, the directive was given to the ELL coordinator to find a way to better serve ELL students in regular classrooms. The training that resulted from this directive was identified by every person I interviewed as one of the most successful areas of professional development for teachers and a way for the district to have common language and strategies for implementation of ELL strategies across the district. The district made the transition from a specialized and separate ELL program to one where all teachers were being trained in ELL strategies. The situation went from ELL education being the job of a few teachers to being a need that the whole district addressed collaboratively. It seems unlikely that the districts would have changed so quickly, as in the Oakwood case, or accepted change so readily, as in the Gateway case, if the main leadership style had been democratic instead of visionary. The superintendents were adept at creating the sense of urgency and the relationships necessary to get enough buy-in to make changes more quickly. They also effectively used the moral purpose. In the process of change, both superintendents had a razor-like focus on finding where students were not achieving where they should be and changing course to meet the vision. Gable and Larson did not always have

the answers, but they depended on the people around them to find the answers and direct their districts in the right direction.

Were the superintendents social justice leaders? The evidence demonstrates that they were. Both superintendents had training in social justice leadership. They were both acutely aware of traditionally marginalized populations and what was needed for those populations to succeed. This was critical in the changes that took place in both districts. Both superintendents addressed injustices in ELL and SwD as well as in other traditionally marginalized populations. However, neither superintendent identified herself or himself as a social justice leader. When Gable was asked about her vision, she identified equity and excellence for all students, with the emphasis on *all*. The people interviewed in her district did not identify her as a social justice leader or as someone who mostly addressed traditionally marginalized populations. When asked about how she addressed ELLs and SwD, they said that she would treat a child with difficulties in their home life the same way she would any other population or individual student. She had a compassion for kids and a passion to educate them in a way that would have them achieve.

Larson specifically stated his belief in achievement for each individual, with the emphasis on *individual*. The interviewees in his district said that he did not believe in canned programs that are designed to be one size fits all. He believed in each individual child and that each child should be treated as an individual. When I interviewed Larson, he shared a medical analogy around this belief. He said that medical treatments are determined by what works for the average person, not each individual. What works for one person might be significantly different than what works for the next person. Not all people are average. He has the same belief about education. We should not be teaching the average child, we should be teaching

individuals. Both superintendents said *all* children, and the actions of both superintendents showed that they meant *all* children, not just marginalized children, not just ELL children, not just children with disabilities. The administrative meeting in Gateway that I attended looked at data of children who had been in the district from kindergarten through grade 10 whose reading skills were minimal or basic. The administrators wanted to know which of the students were students with disabilities, which were ELL students, which students were living in poverty, and so on. The superintendent told the administrators that he would get that data, but he also responded, “Does it matter?” This question did not mean that he wasn't going to address needs of those populations. They did disaggregate data. However, he wanted to know why *any* child who had been in their district since kindergarten was not achieving.

Often a focus on *all* students is not very meaningful and traditionally marginalized students continue to get shortchanged. A leader who commits to *all* can be a social justice leader when he or she has the knowledge and background necessary to address marginalized populations in addition to the focus on *all* other individual students. Another important aspect is that even marginalized students need to be looked at as individuals. All ELL students and all students with disabilities may have some needs common to the label they are given, but within the label of ELL or SwD, students are also individuals and need to be treated that way. ELL students and SwD are achieving in these districts. The superintendents were both very aware of ELL student achievement and achievement of SwD in the district. These students have advocates in the superintendents. Injustices are addressed around these students. However, the vision and the passion from which both superintendents lead are from a place of *all* students achieving. I would even say that both superintendents lead from a place of all *individual* students achieving.

This study and my interview questions focused on ELLs and SwD. The finding was that the superintendents did not target marginalized students. They addressed marginalized students because of their belief that *all* students should achieve. The social justice part comes in because the superintendents had an awareness of what was necessary for achievement of the traditionally marginalized groups of ELLs and SwD and they were not afraid to bring these issues to the forefront. They were also not afraid to address issues with these students if the data showed that there were issues. The actions consistent with social justice work are happening in both districts. However, achievement for all individual populations was the priority over specifically identifying traditionally marginalized populations as the vision for what they do. Were they social justice leaders? Yes. Was their purpose social justice? Not overtly. Their purpose was achievement for all students *including* traditionally marginalized populations.

Ideally, change theory would identify the moral purpose as equity and excellence for all students with a social justice perspective. *All* students in a district can be doing well on average, but without identifying and having the knowledge to address marginalized populations, they may not be meeting the average, or the changes made to help them may not be made with knowledge of how to address their specific needs.

All of the individual components of Fullan's (2001) and Theoharis's (2010) studies are important and play a part in the superintendents' actions, although not equally. The Theoharis (2010) study was based on the work of principals. However, it applied perfectly to the superintendents in these small districts. The strong vision, or moral purpose, about individual students seems to be the most important concept in the framework. Coherence, relationships,

and the focus on student achievement were all important. The vision, however, was the foundation that has to exist to stabilize all of the other components.

Practical Implications

This study yielded several practical implications. Although the sample was small, the superintendent actions in both districts had some similarities. Some of those similarities were a strong vision that encompassed the moral purpose of achievement for *all* students and creating all other actions around the vision or moral purpose, including hiring the right people; creating relationships with the school board, community, and district staff; having high expectations; monitoring data and achievement; facilitating knowledge building and professionalism; and creating coherence.

The moral purpose was the driving force behind everything, and the focus was achievement for every individual student. Both superintendents evidently live their vision. All decisions, goals, knowledge building, and hiring practices were a result of the leader passionately living the vision. Whether they were aware of it or not, each superintendent held every person in the district accountable to the vision. They did this by challenging them, questioning them, leading them, and directing them down the path of the vision. For example, Larson would ask for goals that included 100% of kids. He would say things like, “Show me the 10% who aren’t going to make it? Do you want to identify those 10% of kids?” When he did not agree with how something was being done, he questioned it, although in a way that kept the respect of each administrator. For example, both the superintendent and the curriculum director shared a story of a meeting that was run by the curriculum director. The curriculum director took the work in progress from the meeting to Dr. Larson for feedback. He thought that the product was way too complicated. He asked the curriculum director several questions

and gave feedback on the product to make sure it fit with the vision. Superintendent Gable met with administrators on a regular basis, too. She also questioned and challenged her administrators in a way that kept them all on the same page. She also regularly met with building representatives to discuss issues and to get updates from each building and went through a yearly process of setting goals with the school board and updating the board on a monthly basis.

The vision in both districts definitely played a part in hiring. Hiring was taken very seriously in both districts, and the candidate's vision and values played a large part in whether he or she was hired. In Oakwood, the administrators and teachers agreed that the expectations were set for the job right away in the interview process. The administrative staff in Oakwood said that the superintendent hired people who fit a mold. People were specifically hired to "champion those same vision and values," and if no one fit that mold, the interview process started over. In Gateway, the superintendent was hiring a director of student services. He told me that the first question he asks is, "From where do you lead?" He said this is the most important question because it tells him if the person leads from a place of compassion for kids. If the candidate does not have that vision, Larson does not want them.

Waters and Marzano (2006) found that district-level leadership can have an effect if the district-level leader meets certain defined standards. To positively affect student achievement, the superintendent must:

1. Ensure collaborative goal setting
2. Establish nonnegotiable goals for achievement and instruction
3. Create board alignment with and support of district goals
4. Monitor achievement and instruction goals

5. Allocate resources to support the goals for achievement and instruction. (p. 6)

In terms of district leadership, Waters and Marzano found that the superintendent had to have a clear vision and focus and make sure that the other key decision makers, such as administrators, had the same vision and focus. This study certainly supported those findings. However, Waters and Marzano looked at overall achievement and not specifically at districts that showed achievement of ELLs and SwD. The question in my mind at the beginning of this study was, what did these superintendents do differently than superintendents do who can show that student achievement overall is high without the disaggregation of data to show achievement for ELLs and SwD. The difference for these superintendents is that they lead in a passionate way from a place of compassion for all students and want to give all students the opportunity to achieve at high levels. They were both willing to remove barriers to make that happen. Although there was extensive use of data and the data were discussed and used to improve student achievement, their leadership was not about making the district numbers look good. Everything Gable and Larson did to lead their districts came from that place of wanting to see all kids succeed, to give them all a chance. They both were trained in social justice leadership as part of their administrative program, so they were able to address those populations from a knowledgeable background when there were issues with traditionally marginalized students not achieving; but neither social justice leadership nor traditionally marginalized students were identified by the leaders or the other administrators as the main focus or driving force behind the moral purpose or the vision in the district except as part of the vision of all students achieving.

Conclusion

District superintendents have a key role to play in this time of changing demographics and the need to address all populations of students. The superintendents in Oakwood and Gateway were leaders who have shown success with ELLs and SwD. They also were identified by the state department of education as superintendents who were leaders in achievement for SwD and ELLs. This study demonstrated that the success was partly attributable to the fact that the superintendents knew how to address change. They both held to a strong moral purpose of success for all students. They also knew how to use different styles of leadership to get the job done. They were not afraid to use a visionary style of leadership that was guided by the moral purpose. Neither superintendent identified specific student populations that they were targeting for achievement; but both identified *individual* needs of *all* students, and both were knowledgeable about how to address marginalized populations. Both superintendents had taken classes in social justice through their administrative training, but neither specifically identified social justice as their purpose, although they addressed social justice in their individual districts. In both districts, the purpose was *all* students.

What seemed to set these superintendents apart from superintendents examined in previous research who were effective for the average student is the fact that they had such a strong moral purpose related to individual student achievement. The difference between the studied districts and a district that states in its district plan that all students will be successful is that everything Gable and Larson did was guided by that moral purpose. Staff development and professional learning, goals, resources, and data all revolved around the purpose of all students achieving. Finally, the superintendents created coherence in such a way that several initiatives and changes became a united initiative to support the moral purpose.

A few questions remain that would be appropriate for future research. If the moral purpose part of change theory was about social justice, would that lead to high achievement? How much of a role does the social justice background of the superintendent play in the achievement of ELLs and SwD? And would social justice training for superintendents have an impact on the effect of ELLs and SwD in the districts they lead?

Policy decisions and reform initiatives often disregard traditionally marginalized students in rural districts. The two superintendents in this study demonstrated that their leadership had an impact on administrators, teachers, and ultimately on the achievement of English language learners and students with disabilities. While perhaps limited in scope, these impacts resulting from effective leadership are likely quite prominent in the lives of these students long owed an education debt. We have no time to waste in addressing this debt!

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Appendix A

Entry into Districts Screening Tool

1. Do the district's state test scores meet the criteria for high achievement? (See Appendix D for test data collection.)
2. Do the subgroups of ELLs and SwD meet the criteria for successful achievement? (See Appendix D for data collection.)
3. Does the superintendent meet the criteria for being a factor in student achievement? (Theoharis, 2010; Frattura & Capper, 2006) This will be determined by a pre-study phone interview with superintendents of districts meeting criteria 1 and 2. The purpose and design of the study will be explained in writing to the superintendents, and a copy of the study will be sent to them. After establishing their initial interest and availability, the time for the pre-study interview will be established.
    a. What does the superintendent do to support the achievement of traditionally marginalized populations? (Theoharis, 2010)
    b. Does the superintendent consider him- or herself a key person in leading high achievement for traditionally marginalized students?

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

After choosing a district that is high achieving for all students and is successful with ELL and SwD students, I will address the following research question:

In rural districts that have been successful in terms of high achievement for all students, what actions do superintendents take to cultivate high achievement for both English language learners and students with disabilities?

The purpose of the interviews is to address the research question.

Setting up for the interview with the superintendents and principals:

1. How long have you been in the district?
2. Describe how this district meets the needs of SwD differently now than it has in the past.
3. Describe how this district meets the needs of ELL students differently now than it has in the past.

Interview questions for the superintendents:

4. What specific actions have you taken to help teachers to cultivate effective classrooms for ELLs? SwD?
    a. How did your actions cultivate practices in the classroom to affect the achievement of ELLs? SwD?
    b. What actions did you take that had an *indirect impact* on cultivating practices in the classroom for ELLs? SwD?
        i. District-level practices?
        ii. School-level practices?
        iii. Teacher-level practices?
5. What were the key change processes needed to cultivate teacher practices at any level (district, school, teacher) that contributed to achievement for ELLs? SwD?
    a. What actions do you take to get teachers to enhance learning (that overcome the barriers)?
6. Tell me about a time when you did something to get teachers on track.
7. What did you do to help teachers or administrators to make change?
8. What specific actions have you taken to help principals to cultivate effective classrooms for ELLs? SwD?
9. Tell me about a time when you did something to get a principal on track.

Closing questions:

10. Is there anything you want to add or explain further, related to the study or any of the questions?
11. Do you have any questions for me?

Interview questions for the principals:

Research question:

In rural districts that have been successful in terms of high achievement for all students, what actions do superintendents take to cultivate high achievement for both English language learners and students with disabilities?

1. What role did the superintendent have in cultivating teacher practices in raising achievement for ELLs? For SwD?
2. What actions did the superintendent take to change teacher practices at the district, school, or classroom level with respect to achievement of ELLs? SwD?
3. What barriers did the superintendent encounter in cultivating teacher practices regarding raising achievement of ELLs? SwD?
4. How did the superintendent overcome the barriers to make the necessary change?
5. What effect has the superintendent had on the way you work with teachers in their practices in helping raise achievement for ELL? SwD?
6. What does the superintendent do to address each of the following in relation to ELLs? SwD?
    a. Defining the purpose or reason for addressing these populations
    b. Helping you and your teachers understand change
    c. Assisting with developing relationships with these students and their families
    d. Helping staff with knowledge building as it relates to teaching ELLs and SwD
    e. Developing coherence among programs and processes
7. What does the superintendent do to address each of the following?
    a. Barriers for ELLs? SwD?
    b. Staff professionalism, especially as it relates to ELLs and SwD?
    c. Connections with the community? Marginalized populations?
    d. Achievement of ELLs? SwD?

Closing questions:

8. Is there anything you want to add or explain further, related to the study or any of the questions?
9. Do you have any questions for me?

Interview questions for teachers:

Setting up for the interview with the teachers:

1. Were you here when the district made changes in serving ELLs? SwD?
2. Describe how this district meets the needs of SLD students.
3. Describe how this district meets the needs of ELL students.

Research question: In districts that have been successful in terms of high achievement for all students, what actions do superintendents take to cultivate high achievement for both English language learners and students with disabilities?

1. What did the superintendent do to cultivate teacher practices in serving ELLs? SwD?
2. What actions did the superintendent take that changed teacher practices in the classroom with ELLs? SwD?
    a. What support was provided?
    b. Were there any actions that you are aware of at a district level or a building level?
3. What barriers did the superintendent have in providing the leadership needed to change teacher practices regarding increasing achievement of ELLs? SwD?
4. How did the superintendent overcome the barriers?
5. What is it about the superintendent that helped you to make the necessary changes?
6. What does the superintendent do to address each of the following in relation to ELLs? SwD?
    a. Defining the purpose or reason for addressing these populations
    b. Helping teachers understand change
    c. Assisting with developing relationships with these students and their families
    d. Helping staff with knowledge building as it relates to teaching ELLs, SwD
    e. Developing coherence among programs and processes
7. What does the superintendent do to address each of the following?
    a. Barriers for ELLs? SwD?
    b. Staff professionalism, especially as it relates to ELLs and SwD?
    c. Connections with the community? Marginalized populations?
    d. Achievement of ELLs? SwD?

Closing questions:

8. Is there anything you want to add or explain further, related to the study or any of the questions?
9. Do you have any questions for me?

Appendix C

Observation Protocol/Checklist

School District_____Date_____Place_____

Were any of the following topics addressed? How?

- ☐ moral purpose
- ☐ understanding change
- ☐ developing relationships
- ☐ knowledge building
- ☐ coherence making
- ☐ addressing structures that marginalize, segregate, and impede achievement
- ☐ inclusive structures and practices
- ☐ addressing deprofessionalized teaching staff
- ☐ connections to community, especially marginalized families
- ☐ addressing low student achievement of marginalized populations
- ☐ teacher efficacy

Notes:

Appendix D

Document Collection: Test Results

Date: Fall 2011 Source: State Department of Education

Student Populations by District

District	Student population	Students with disabilities (%)	ELL students (%)
Oakwood	1,250	11.0	12.7
Nature Way	1,716	11.8	5.5
Green River	2,032	15.5	16.0
Eagle Ridge	2,718	13.3	6.1
South City	3,392	10.8	1.1
Mount Gray	3,595	15.2	2.3
Gateway	4,675	10.6	13.0
Westside	5,840	11.8	6.1
River Edge	7,023		
Center City	8,522		
Northside	10,806		
Eastgate	13,906		
Orange Grove	15,078		

Student Achievement Data

Achievement of All Students

Reading	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010
Oakwood	81.0%	82.7%	85.1%	82.9%	82.7%
Green River	81.6%	82.4%	83.5%	81.5%	81.9%
Gateway	88.6%	89.1%	89.1%	87.8%	87.1%
State	81.8%	82.2%	82.0%	81.5%	81.7%
Math	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010
Oakwood	78.7%	77.4%	76.6%	78.8%	79.3%
Green River	70.9%	76.0%	76.7%	77.3%	78.7%
Gateway	82.8%	83.7%	83.3%	84.8%	82.9%
State	72.8%	75.2%	74.9%	76.9%	77.4%

Achievement of Students with Disabilities

	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010
			Average scores in reading (%)		
Oakwood	45.1	49.5	44.6	43.7	42.7
Green River	*	42.5	43.1	32.5	36.3
Gateway	58.5	62.9	60.2	51.9	47.9
State	46.9	48.2	47.6	46.5	46.5
			Average scores in math (%)		
Oakwood	52.3	44.6	43.1	38.8	41.2
Green River	*	36.5	45.0	37.5	43.1
Gateway	45.3	50.3	51.7	47.4	44.7
State	39.7	43.3	42.4	44.6	45.0

* Insufficient number of students to report student data.

Achievement of ELL Students

	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010
			Average scores in reading (%)		
Oakwood	54.2%	63.9%	77.9%	59.3%	62.1%
Green River	61.0%	56.4%	56.5%	61.6%	58.4%
Gateway	56.6%	55.1%	56.5%	57.8%	59.6%
State	52.6%	52.1%	53.7%	52.5%	54.2%
			Average scores in math (%)		
Oakwood	47.9%	56.8%	47.5%	46.3%	53.9%
Green River	53.8%	60.6%	50.9%	59.6%	58.5%
Gateway	49.7%	48.3%	52.0%	49.7%	53.7%
State	49.5%	53.0%	51.3%	53.9%	55.9%

Other Academic Indicators: ELL Access Test

Test results for years 2005-2006 through 2009-2010 with the exception of 2007-2008, when the data were not given out at the state level.

	Access for ELL Test				
	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010
Oakwood	Met growth	Met growth	*	Met growth	Met growth
Gateway	Met growth	Met growth	*	Met growth	Met growth

	District adequate yearly progress (AYP)		
	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Oakwood	Met AYP	Met AYP	Met AYP
Gateway	Met AYP	Met AYP	Met AYP

Appendix E

Document Collection Protocol

Data sources:

Vision and mission: Collected form district websites

Additional data: Handouts from meetings attended in the districts

Meeting minutes for the following meetings:

Oakwood Administrative-Building Representative Meeting, February 2011

Gateway Administrative Leadership Meeting, April 2011

Appendix F

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
Research Participant Information and Consent Form

Title of the Study: Students with Disabilities and English Language Learners: The Role of the Rural Superintendent in Cultivating High Achievement

Principal Investigator: Clifton F. Conrad, PhD (phone: 608-263-3411) (e-mail: conrad@education.wisc.edu)

Student Researcher: Lynee Tourdot (phone: 608-843-6910)

DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH You are invited to participate in a research study about the impact of the superintendent on academic achievement for English language learners and/or students with disabilities.

You have been asked to participate because you are a superintendent, student services director, ELL coordinator, curriculum director, principal, or teacher who served in that position during the time of improved academic achievement for English language learners and/or students with disabilities, or other participants have identified you as an individual who can provide insight about the effect of the superintendent on achievement for English language learners and/or students with disabilities.

The purpose of the research is to identify the actions that the superintendent took that contribute to academic achievement for English language learners and/or students with disabilities.

This study will include the superintendent of a rural (fewer than 5,000 students) school district with measurable improved achievement for English language learners and/or students with disabilities.

Interviews will be conducted at the offices of the participants or other locations identified by the participants. Digital audiotapes will be made of your participation and kept in a password-protected file. The transcripts will also be digital with coded names and identifying information. The digital transcripts will also be kept in a password-protected file. Only the student investigator, faculty investigator, and professional transcriber will hear the recording. The digital files will be destroyed 7 years after the end of the study.

WHAT WILL MY PARTICIPATION INVOLVE? If you decide to participate in this research, you will be asked to participate in a pre-study interview taking about 20 minutes to determine the eligibility of your district. If your district qualifies and decides to participate, you will be involved in an interview ranging from 1 to 2 hours, and possibly a brief follow-up interview via telephone or e-mail. You will also be given an opportunity to review the content of the interview that will be used in the dissertation before the dissertation is submitted for

review. Your participation will last approximately 1 to 2 hours per session and will require one session. Your time, including the interview, follow-up interviews, and content review, could require up to 4 hours.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO ME?

This study will identify the actions that the superintendent took that contribute to academic achievement for English language learners and/or students with disabilities. To fully understand the attributes of the relationship, some sensitive information may be shared. There are some risks associated with the sharing of sensitive material that should be acknowledged. Safeguards include the use of pseudonyms; only the researcher, transcriber, and faculty advisor having access to the digital audio recordings; and participant review of content before submission. Privacy and confidentiality are a priority.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO ME?

By participating in this study, you are contributing to the field of education research regarding academic achievement for English language learners and/or students with disabilities. I also hope that this provides an opportunity for you to reflect on the achievements of the school district over the time frame being investigated; **however, there are no direct benefits to you as a participant**.

HOW WILL MY CONFIDENTIALITY BE PROTECTED?

While there will probably be publications as a result of this study, your name will not be used. Only group characteristics will be published. If you participate in this study, we would like to be able to quote you directly without using your name. If you agree to allow us to quote you in publications, please initial the statement at the bottom of this form.

WHOM SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

You may ask any questions about the research at any time. If you have questions about the research after you leave today, you should contact the principal investigator, Clifton F. Conrad, PhD, at 608-263-3411. You may also call the student researcher, Lynee Tourdot, at 608-843-6910.

If you are not satisfied with response of research team, have more questions, or want to talk with someone about your rights as a research participant, you should contact the Education Research and Social & Behavioral Science IRB Office at 608-263-2320.

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you begin participation and change your mind, you may end your participation at any time without penalty.

Your signature indicates that you have read this consent form, had an opportunity to ask any questions about your participation in this research, and voluntarily consent to participate. You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Name of Participant (please print):_____

_____ _____

Signature Date

_____ I give my permission to be quoted directly in publications without using my name.