

Transformational School District Leaders: The Characteristics of Long-standing School District
Leaders That Have Successfully Navigated Educational Reform Efforts in Ohio

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School District Leaders That Have Successfully Navigated
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ABSTRACT

School reform has long been a challenge in public education, with limited focus on the leadership qualities essential for successful reform implementation. This dissertation examined the role and impact of transformational leadership in navigating educational reform efforts within Ohio's school districts. Utilizing a qualitative descriptive study, it focused on the experiences and strategies of long-standing school district leaders. Participants included a diverse group of school leaders who have been instrumental in implementing reform initiatives. Through in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, the study uncovered how these leaders describe and implement mandated reform efforts, highlighting the challenges and successes encountered. Results reveal key strategies for effective change management, emphasizing the importance of visionary leadership and community engagement. The conclusions drawn from this research offer valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and future leaders in education reform.

Keywords: transformational leadership, educational reform, school district leaders, qualitative study, Ohio

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

School reform is an issue that has plagued educators and legislators. During the American colonial era, educational attainment depended solely on a family's income level and residency, which has continued to be the reality for many today (Kober & Stark-Rentner, 2020). Access to education was a privilege offered primarily to white male upper-class children, thus establishing the societal divide. The first educational reform efforts began as early as the late 1600s when the Quakers established schools to educate Black and Native American children (Cengage, 2022). In 1642 Massachusetts passed the first law requiring schooling for every child (Cengage, 2022). The law dictated that every town establish a school. Many cities did not comply, but those who did only educated white children (Vasquez-Martinez et al., 2013).

School reform aims to transform educational structures while increasing the quality of education offered. School reform efforts primarily center around leadership, frequently enabling extensive modifications to enhance both organizational structures and academic outcomes. Although federal legislation has notably focused on funding (Title 1, Race to the Top, CARES Act, ESSER), the academic impact on urban schools has fallen flat and proved ineffective (Kaestle, 2016). Even though school reform efforts escalated through the 1980s and 1990s (Orfield & Eaton, 1996), the problem of resegregation became more entrenched on the heels of No Child Left Behind in the early 2000s as the success of non-white students continued to decline (Orfield & Lee, 2007).

Data from the last decade show that large-scale reforms have not had the designed effect on student achievement. Increased accountability has sometimes resulted in increased pressure

on school staff and unintended negative impacts on student academic outcomes (Finnigan, 2010; The Nation's Report Card, 2016). Despite decades of reform, districts and schools have shown little or no progress toward meeting the 100% proficiency benchmark or narrowing the achievement gap, particularly for disadvantaged students (Dee & Jacob, 2011; Fuller et al., 2007). Federal education reforms of the past two decades have aimed to eliminate the achievement gaps and improve student academic outcomes, particularly in the nation's lowest-performing urban and rural schools. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), the Race to the Top Fund (RTT), and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Flexibility Waiver increased accountability for districts and schools by implementing achievement targets and high-stakes standardized testing, incentivizing the implementation of rigorous improvement efforts, and establishing sanctions for so-called failing schools (Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 2011; NCLB, 2002; Race to the Top Fund, 2009). These reforms relied heavily on prescribed reform agendas focused on improving curriculum, leadership, and teaching. Even the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, with its opportunity for flexibility and promise of increased local control, mandates accountability based on standardized assessments and rigorous interventions for lower-performing schools. In response to federal mandates to improve student academic outcomes and eliminate the achievement gap between subgroups, states, districts, and schools have invested billions of dollars in funding to implement improvement practices (Singer, 2018).

Problem Statement

Since educational reform efforts have spanned more than 30 years, urban school districts continue to struggle to provide their students with robust learning experiences (Kolzeski & Smith, 2009). Indicators of student success such as academic achievement, graduation rates, and

postsecondary achievement are lower for students of color, English Learner (EL) students, and students with disabilities (Blanchett, 2006; Chapman & Antrop-González, 2011), leading states to enact sanctions on failing schools and districts.

Before 2015, urban schools in Ohio exhibited systemic failures, highlighted by low test scores, which led the state of Ohio to enact the Academic Distress Commission (ADC), implementing reform achievement, planning, and finance structures (Greene, 2019). In 2015 governmental legislation went a step further with House Bill 70 (H.B. 70), which was sponsored by Governor John Kasich. House Bill 70 was introduced in February 2015 to require school districts to create community learning centers at schools where academic performance was low (Trevas, 2020). This bill required failing schools to offer comprehensive educational development, family, and health services to students and families during and after regular school hours (Trevas, 2020). House Bill 70 boosted the ADC's power by following the business model of appointing a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to lead failing school districts with absolute managerial authority as well as creating and implementing an improvement plan (Churchill et al., 2020). Chief Executive Officers replaced traditional school superintendents in managing the daily operations of struggling school districts. With the introduction of private market ideas into the school systems, such as incentives for teachers, removal of poor-performing staff, and complete budgetary control, CEOs were generally given unilateral power to enact necessary reforms (*The Chicago Reporter*, 2022). The Chicago Public School System introduced this concept in 1995 (Leviis, 2011). Youngstown (2009), Lorain (2013), Cleveland, and East Cleveland (2018) school districts adhere to the CEO model under the guise of school reform in Ohio, representative of the ADC.

With little to no changes in academic achievement, these school districts are moving away from the grips of state reform; however, CEO leadership remains. To be released from the ADC, Youngstown, Lorain, and East Cleveland must submit a three-year improvement plan to the Ohio Department of Education, which the state must approve (Hancock, 2021). If the district meets most of the benchmarks outlined in the plan after three years, then the district can return to normal operations (Ohio Department of Education, 2019). Although most CEO leaders struggled with student achievement (Quinn, 2020), some leaders developed the capacity to implement reform efforts successfully.

Research is needed to create a deeper understanding of transformational leaders' practices when leading and sustaining reform efforts. Describing transformational leadership practices employed by CEO leaders in low-performing schools and districts could provide other leaders with insight to navigate federal and local reform mandates that have become synonymous with urban school districts. This study is intended to provide an overview of transformational leaders' successful characteristics in implementing mandated reform efforts.

The problem that this proposed qualitative, descriptive study seeks to address is that it is unknown how long-standing, transformational school district leaders in Ohio, appointed to their positions through legislation, describe and implement mandated reform efforts.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this proposed qualitative study was to understand how long-standing, transformational school district leaders in Ohio, who were appointed to their positions through legislation, describe and implement mandated reform efforts. Understanding how long-standing leaders overcame barriers and mitigating factors in transforming schools and districts may support other school leaders who are tapped to lead reform efforts in various urban settings.

This study aimed to identify the specific qualities and characteristics of transformational leaders in turnaround schools and districts, while also determining the leadership characteristics necessary for successfully navigating federal and state reform efforts

Research Questions

The following questions guided the study and were designed to garner experiences and lessons learned from transformational school district leaders engaged in school reform efforts.

The central questions of the study were:

1. How do long-standing, transformational school district leaders in Ohio, who were appointed to their positions through legislation, describe successful reform efforts?
2. How do long-standing, transformational school district leaders in Ohio, who were appointed to their positions through legislation, describe the implementation of successful reform efforts?

Sub-questions include:

1. Which leadership practices were identified as successful within school reform environment?
2. What are the primary leadership qualities that emerge for transformational leaders?
3. What outside factors do transformational leaders identify as having shaped their approaches to school reform in public urban school districts?
4. How are policy mandates, such as new graduation requirements, more rigorous standards, and demands for school accountability, shape leadership decisions?

Methodology

This study used a qualitative design with one-to-one interviews to understand how long-standing, transformational school district leaders in Ohio, who were appointed to their positions

through legislation, described and implemented mandated reform efforts. Qualitative research can describe chronological flow, determine which events lead to consequences, and derive fruitful explanations that evolve from other people's experiences (Austin & Sutton, 2014). Because this study aimed to understand the leadership characteristics transformational leaders possess while engaging in reform efforts, the researcher planned to use a nonprobability purposive sampling, which allowed the researcher to develop a deep sense of the leadership capabilities needed to successfully navigate school and district reform from those currently engaged in the process. As patterns and themes emerged, the researcher completed a cross-analysis to determine how success was measured by the Ohio Schools Report Card compared to the leader's longevity and perceived success within the school or district. The cross-analysis allowed the researcher to conclude transformational leaders and the characteristics they possess in navigating reform efforts (Ryan, 2012). The role of the researcher in qualitative research is to attempt to access the thoughts and feelings of study participants (Sutton & Austin, 2015).

Rationale and Significance of Study

The purpose of the proposed qualitative, descriptive study was to understand how long-standing, transformational school leaders in Ohio, who were appointed to their positions through legislation, described and implemented mandated reform efforts. This study was significant in the area of urban school reform as it informed school leaders as well as school districts of the attributes needed for long-term, successful reform. Although states have worked to support struggling schools through multiple reform efforts, the schools and districts labeled as failing are primarily educational centers in urban centers that serve minority populations. In particular, the Ohio School Report Cards is designed to provide a picture of a district's progress by measuring the most critical areas related to student achievement, finances and expenditures, educators, and

staffing (Ohio Department of Education, 2022), yet the bottom 15% of failing schools in Ohio are minority school districts (Ohio Schools Report Card, 2022). Effective school leaders are critical to large-scale, sustainable education reform (Fullan, 2002). Yet, there is minimal research on the qualities that transformational leaders possess as they navigate school reform. “Recruiting top-performing leaders and rewarding good performance are both important, notwithstanding the recognition that improvement is more a function of learning to do the right thing in the environment” (Elmore, 2000, p. 25). The evolution of accountability systems in Ohio has spanned more than 20 years, focusing on specific academic indicators with little attention to leadership capabilities. The organizational capacity of districts should contain organizational features such as effective leadership, which can facilitate the implementation process of school improvement and reform (van Kuyik et al., 2021).

The type of qualitative study that was used is a narrative methodology to allow the readers to understand the journey of school and district leaders in the throes of school reform mandates. A narrative approach allowed for a personal account of the typology of the districts, the downward academic trajectory, and the political implications associated with school reform, particularly the characteristics of these school leaders (Brauckmann et al., 2020; Peck, 2017). This study contributed to the school reform efforts by focusing on leadership capacity and traits for school districts seeking to employ transformational leaders, future leaders with the ability to measure their acumen to engage in school improvement efforts, networks of support for leaders in like districts, and specifically the proven characteristics of leaders who are engaged or have led such efforts.

Role of the Researcher

To gauge the leadership characteristics of long-standing, successful school and district leaders engaged in reform efforts, the researcher used semi-structured interviews (descriptive approach). After conducting in-depth interviews, the researcher identified patterns and themes regarding leadership styles and characteristics. Once the patterns and themes were identified, the researcher conducted a cross-analysis to determine the measures of success. The researcher was the principal investigator and instrument to gather data from personal semi-structured interviews. The researcher shared the results of the findings with each participant and identified the dominant characteristics school transformational leaders should possess to succeed in school reform efforts.

Limitations and Assumptions

Limitations of the study included the researcher's use of qualitative semi-structured interviews that were used as the primary vehicle to collect data related to transformational school leaders and the characteristics they possess to navigate school reform successfully. According to Kakilla (2021), data loss could potentially occur when conducting semi-structured interviews due to the interview's feasibility when they are not conducted face-to-face (e.g., online platforms such as video conferencing tools, emails, and similar settings), including poor or limited responses.

In this study, the limitations included school leaders' availability and participation ability. Another limitation in using the semi-structured interview method was that the researcher must rely on the ability of the participants to articulate and recall their path of school reform within their district and being able to identify specifically what landed their district under reform efforts and the specific steps they used to navigate the process (Maxwell, 2013).

A third limitation was the expectation of the participant to be transparent with the researcher. The stigma of being engaged in school reform has caused many educational leaders to be hesitant to share best practices and characteristics they have proven to be successful in the given environment, as knowledge sharing typically happens under certain conditions (Son et al., 2020). A fourth limitation of the study was the locality of the study. Although school reform is a universal concern, this study was conducted in Ohio. Because this research was limited to one topographical area, it may not fully represent the characteristics of transformational leaders from other regions or representative of previous transformational leaders. The final limitation of the study was its small population sample. The sample size was limited as the study aimed to identify the characteristics of transformational leaders in reform efforts in Ohio, particularly leaders and districts identified by the Ohio Schools Report Card as failing districts. The small population did preclude the generalizability of the results from the study to a larger population. However, the determination of the size was made by the researcher with respect to managing the data.

Based on the literature review, understanding change and specifically implementing it according to the district's environment was key to the success of transformational leadership. An essential component was understanding what type of change was to be implemented: system or comprehensive. It was not fully known how transformational leaders view the type of reform implemented and how it matched their leadership style. This study assumed that transformational leaders have little understanding of the differences between comprehensive and system reform (Culpeper, 2018; Eisner, 2005). The researcher assumed that participants know the Ohio Schools Report Card measures and the indicators that have identified their particular districts as failing; thus, the researcher provided participants with their current districts' data. The researcher

assumed that participants would answer the questions truthfully, although knowledge sharing is a known limitation. The final assumption was that participants would fully explain and understand the leadership characteristics they have used in their districts to successfully navigate school reform efforts.

Operational Definitions

The following section provides operational definitions describing how they are used in this research study.

Board of Education: Elected or appointed representatives serving on governing bodies located in communities served by public schools (*Glossary*, 2014).

Change Leadership: The ability to influence and inspire action in others and respond with vision and agility during periods of growth, disruption, or uncertainty to bring about the needed change (Akpoveta, 2022).

Chief Executive Officer (CEO): An appointed individual by the state's academic distress commission with high-level management experience in the public or private sector to exercise complete operational, managerial, and instructional control of the district (Ohio Rev. Code § 3302.10).

Comprehensive School Reform: A type of school-wide or whole-school reform that is a coordinated effort to overhaul all parts and systems of a school's operation, which seeks to integrate curriculum, instruction, professional development, parental involvement, classroom management, and school management efforts (Staresina, 2020).

Education Reform: the goal of changing public education in educational theory and practice focusing on outputs, such as student achievement (Top Hat, 2020).

Entrepreneurial Leadership: A leadership mindset that focuses organizations on turning problems into opportunities that create economic and social value (Atwater, 2022).

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA): ESSA is the federal K-12 education law of the United States. ESSA was signed into law in 2015 and replaced the previous education law, “No Child Left Behind.” ESSA extended more flexibility to States in education and laid out expectations of transparency for parents and communities (Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2020).

House Bill 70 (HB 70): (ORC) section 3302.10, which requires the superintendent of public instruction to establish an academic distress commission (ADC) for a school district that meets a specific set of conditions. It also describes how the school district will be governed and managed. The statute became effective in October 2015 (Ohio Department of Education, 2019).

Instructional Leadership: The ability to involve colleagues collaboratively in mutual learning and development, with the main purpose of improving teaching and learning (IGI Global, 2022).

Lewin’s Change Theory: Lewin's theory proposes that individuals and groups of individuals are influenced by restraining forces, or obstacles that counter driving forces aimed at keeping the status quo, and driving forces, or positive forces for change that push in the direction that causes change to happen (Wojciechowski et al., 2016).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB): The NCLB Act of 2001, a U.S. federal law aimed at improving public primary and secondary schools, and thus student performance, via increased accountability for schools, school districts, and states (Nolen & Duignan, 2021).

Ohio School Report Card: System designed to provide performance information provided by schools and districts, including academic, financial, and opportunity to learn data. Some of

these data are then combined into six components that receive star ratings to indicate the level of performance of the school and district (*Ohio School Report Cards*, 2019).

School District Leaders: The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) in a school district is appointed through state legislation, the liaison to the board of education, manages the daily operations of the school district by making day-to-day decisions on educational programs, finances, personnel, and facilities, and acts as a lead communicator on behalf of the district on school matters (Meador, 2019).

Systemic Reform: A type of reform that embodies three integral components: (1) promoting of ambitious student outcomes for all students; (2) aligning of policy approaches and the actions of various policy institutions to promote such outcomes; and (3) restructuring the governance system to support improved achievement (Goertz, Floden, O’Day, 1995).

Takeovers: Assuming control of a school district and replacing all, or part, of the locally elected school board or superintendent (Dragone, 2021).

Transformational Leadership: A leadership approach that causes change in individuals and social systems with the end goal of developing followers into leaders (Langston University, 2020).

Turnaround Leadership: A leadership approach to address persistently low-performing schools and districts as measured by student achievement according to state tests (Fullan, 2006).

Urban Schools: Urban schools are often characterized by lower academic achievement and high rates of mobility by students (IGI Global, 2022).

Organization of the Dissertation

This qualitative study focused on transformational leadership characteristics in successfully navigating school reform efforts. Chapter I discussed the problem statement, the

purpose of the study, key definitions, the researcher's role, the study's significance, and research questions. Chapter II addressed the review of pertinent literature used to understand the relevancy of the topic, the theoretical framework, and the types of leadership characteristics studied and identified as relevant. The context of Chapter II also focused on the kind of reforms, systemic or comprehensive, failing schools engage in that are forced through legislative efforts while determining the type of leadership style that may or may not complement the reform effort. Chapter III highlighted the methodology of the research study, including the conceptual framework, the data collection and cross-analysis of the semi-structured interviews and emerged patterns and themes, and a document review of state report card data and identified indicators of failure determined by the state of Ohio for the particular district included in the study. Chapter IV recognized the themes and findings gathered from the research that were analyzed and shared with the participants. Finally, the results and implications of the research study for transformational school leaders that have engaged in school reform efforts successfully, as well as the legislative hurdles that they have overcome, were presented in Chapter V.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the 1860s, the notion of reforming education has remained at the forefront for legislators and governing bodies. One of the most significant concerns with systems of school reform is whether institutions have determined the effectiveness of reform efforts and whether or not the structures and systems implemented are equitable. These concerns have reignited the debate of whether schools should be forced to change according to a prescribed set of standards to ensure success or be allowed to address their root cause in search of improvement.

Comprehensive school reform, including federal and state legislation, can produce comprehensive programs to ensure broad equity and, most importantly, influence policies concerning curriculum PreK- 12, resources, teaching approaches, growth, and student evaluation (Learning Policy Institute, 2020). States that want to implement systemic change must first agree on a core set of challenging and engaging information, skills, and problem-solving abilities for all students (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2018). All state rules regulating instruction should be based on these aims, resulting in a consistent and supportive policy structure for school reform (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). The best thinking in the field on the knowledge, procedures, and abilities students need to know in each core curriculum topic should be laid forth in state curricular frameworks. These frameworks should be linked to instruction, instructional materials, and high-quality assessment systems (National Research Council, 2014). Pre-service professional programs should shift from a focus on subject-area credit collection to a focus on preparing teachers to teach the content expected of students.

In contrast, in-service professional development opportunities should allow instructional staff to develop and refine their expertise in state framework content and effective pedagogical

approaches (Feit, 2016). School-level employees would develop specific curricula, programs, and pedagogies to meet the statewide objectives. Schools must be given adequate liberty and monetary and additional support to modify their curriculum to match local conditions and the needs of their pupils to accomplish this task. Education systems should be able to contribute to creating a more equal, inclusive, and socially just world despite reforms (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2017).

Leadership is key to school reform as strong leaders prepare for change at the organizational level, empower the leadership of others with a shared vision for local reform, and help sustain a coherent program of school-wide development (Hill et al., 2016; Jensen & Farmer, 2013; Klar, 2013). In addition, research demonstrates that rapid school improvement hinges on solid leadership (WestEd, 2017).

Legislation

For the past few decades, legislation and policy changes have driven school reform, particularly in measuring student progress (Justia, 2021). The federal government has become involved in education reform through educational laws and initiatives like the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015. Just as Ronald Reagan used the ESEA reauthorization to advance a federal education agenda, William Clinton's reauthorization of the 1994 Improving America's Schools Act further federalized accountability based on standardized testing and called for content standards to be set (Spurrier, 2018). Next came George W. Bush's 2002 reauthorization of NCLB.

NCLB expanded standardized testing to yearly. NCLB revised the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and has had a non-equitable effect on recent school reform (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). NCLB holds two critical practices relative to school

reform: performance and scientific evidence (Carnoy, 2000). Following the reform, the rationale for an execution is to strengthen U.S. students' knowledge base and skills to prepare them better to work in an increasingly global market (Carnoy, 2000). Providing schools and districts with evidence-based interventions for system improvement is a cornerstone of NCLB directly connected to scientific evidence (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). NCLB has migrated over time from a standards-based strategy to testing and accountability. To avoid sanctions due to accountability, school districts have sought to revise and implement reform efforts that have been legislatively sanctioned by state and federal governments (Dee & Jacob, 2010). This legislation addressed a vital issue in sociological literature by explaining and addressing the racial gap in student performance by requiring each racial subgroup's assessment scores to be disaggregated (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2020). It also requires a single statewide accountability system that includes all students and identifies and reports whether or not students in individual school districts make adequate progress (Schneider & Keesler, 2007). Accountability systems have become universal, upholding a set of policies that hold schools and districts accountable for raising student achievement and improving learning conditions (Education Trust, 2020).

The federal policy provided the assumption that standards and assessments should bring about higher student achievement remained the basis of NCLB's replacement, the Barack Obama 2015 ESEA reauthorization, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Instead of requiring all schools to meet annual performance targets, ESSA requires states to focus on a small set of low-performing schools and gives them considerable latitude to design the interventions they deem appropriate (Brookings Report, 2017). ESSA affords states broad freedom regarding student performance, accountability, and school reform (Black, 2017). In 2015 alone, at least 11 states

debated or passed legislation that would allow for state-run districts (Layton, 2016). There are at least 34 states that now have explicit authority to take over the management of schools, districts, or both under legislative reforms (Jochim, 2016). Twenty states now have legislation authorizing state interventions and mandates relative to finances that issue a declaration of emergency constituting legislative reform actions within school districts (Huh et al., 2016). Compared to NCLB, ESSA required states to focus on a small set of small-performing schools and gave them latitude to design interventions appropriate to their needs.

In 2017 Donald Trump issued legislation that was in stark contrast to the bipartisan consensus reached in 2015. During bipartisan legislation, Congress passed a new education law that shifted the focus from testing to teaching, pushed decision-making back to states and communities, and continued investing funds in the schools that need it the most. Education legislation before 2017 offered districts an opportunity to focus on what worked best for kids and schools—promoting children’s well-being, engaging in powerful learning, building teacher capacity, and fostering cultures of collaboration. Instead, the Trump - DeVos agenda jeopardized that work; their view that education is a commodity instead of a public good contrasted with previous reform mandates (Weingarten, 2017). The Biden administration has since focused on the American Rescue Plan to fund reforms (American Rescue Plan Act, 2021). President Biden's FY2022 budget request, which was later passed, includes student-centered and education-centered provisions. No programs were eliminated or consolidated. His Recovery and Rebuilding: Education Provisions in The American Families Plan adds two years of free Early education and \$200 billion over 10 years for universal, high-quality pre-K for all three and four-year-olds. It will also expand broadband access, \$100 billion over 10 years to bring high-quality, reliable broadband to all American families closing the homework gap (U.S. Department of

Education, March 2022). The Biden plan addresses the need to move education ahead. If this intervention continues and addresses all forms of education, including equity, there will be less need for sweeping reforms.

Educational reform efforts hinge on political influence and remain a top priority for each presidential administration. During the first half of the 1990s, there was a focus on reform efforts born out of policy at the state and federal levels. Policymakers were focusing on the results of educational systems rather than the inputs. The National Science Foundation (NSF) awarded 26 Statewide Systemic Initiative (SSI) grants to 26 states to encourage system reform from a curricular aspect hoping to see improvements in science, mathematics, engineering, and technology (Confrey, 2018). These grants spurred the Goals 2000: Educate America Act enacted in 1994, which was established to provide resources to states and school systems as they focused on systemic reform. The 1994 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, now entitled Improving America's Schools Act, further requires states to develop improvement plans that establish high content performance standards (Goertz, 1996).

The Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Project Act of 1997 (CSR) emerged in the late 1990s. This initiative attempted to reform every aspect of the school itself, including teaching and learning, staff development and training, the establishment of measurable goals against which student achievement is evaluated, a rigorous curriculum, and a greater community and familial involvement (Stevenson, 2000). CSR derived from a 1991 private sector initiative called New American Schools Development Corporation (NAS), whose mission was to engage in whole-school restructuring models. The reform efforts of CSR were developed out of the standards movement, where the core idea is that students should be able to show their level of mastery. At the same time, reformers would be able to promote high-quality curricular

frameworks and assessments tied to those standards (Schneider & Keesler, 2006). A hallmark for comprehensive reform was allocating resources to ensure that all students, especially poor students, receive a high-quality education, thus enhancing their learning opportunities and improving their life chances (Darling-Hammond, 2004).

Current reform efforts follow evidence-based policy recommendations for policy-level decisions before enacting school reform (Biesta, 2006; Matsushita, 2017; Pawson, 2006). However, reform has since evolved its focus to factors such as quality, access, equality of opportunity, finance, management, effectiveness, and efficiency (Vasquez- Martinez et al., 2013). In addition, the evolution of reform requires schools to adopt new governance structures, institute comprehensive instructional reforms, create community-oriented schools, and have operational flexibility (Karam, 2015).

Leadership

Leadership springs from a collective orientation in which people have to be inspired to work together to solve mutual concerns (Emerging Leaders, 2016). Different terms, concepts, and representations of school leadership vary according to language, country, culture, and the structures that govern education. According to Pont (2020), the phrase school leadership reflects changes in the role of leaders over the last 20 to 30 years. He further stated that in many education systems, a shift can be observed from a more administrative and bureaucratic function to one that is more involved in working with teachers and other staff to improve school results. Research has shown three effective leadership types for reform leaders: change leadership, instructional leadership, and entrepreneurial leadership (Akopevta, 2021; Brolund, 2016; Kassai, 2022).

Change Leadership

Change leadership requires abundant and explicit permission to fail as a precedent to learning and requires that healthy failure is an essential part of human and organizational learning (Tapia & Walker, 2020). It is also the ability to influence and inspire action in others and respond with vision and agility during growth, disruption, or uncertainty to bring about the needed change (Akopevta, 2021). Change leadership encompasses cultural change and requires an instructional leader to be attuned to the big picture being a sophisticated conceptual thinker who transforms the organization through people and teams (Acton, 2020). Finally, change leadership requires true, visible ownership for outcomes from the highest levels (Akpoveta, 2022). Principals leading change must understand the change dynamics within their school context and work directly with teams to manage the change process (Minnesota Department of Education, 2019). According to *Change Leadership a Guide for New Leaders*, there are eight elements of change leadership.

The nature of change and understanding change is the first element of change leadership, similar to Lewin's Change Model: Step 1 'unfreezing' (Hussain et al., 2018). To ensure lasting and effective change, a leader must make sure that the effort aims for the proper outcomes and addresses the root causes of the challenges that have been identified. Change leaders can view the whole picture and define a comprehensive response that captures the change required in a school community. Change leadership is the engine of change; it is about urgency, vision, empowering people, and seizing the opportunity (Center for Education Reform, 2020). The goal is to make change happen smarter and faster with accelerated efficiency. It is the process that fuels large-scale transformation (Kotter, 2012). Mulford (2006) noted that change leadership for student achievement will succeed when people are empowered to actively engage in making

decisions by creating reciprocal trust and respect through leadership. In addition, leaders “promote professional development and win the support of influential teachers” (Zimmerman, 2006, p. 241). The school leader's job is to inspire, create, and support change so the district can move from its current state of perceived ineptness to where it needs to be. The result is to ensure the best outcomes for all its students, strengthen the professional practice of faculty and staff, and improve the school culture for all stakeholders (Issah, 2018). Change leadership requires actual, visible ownership for outcomes from the highest levels. School leaders in change environments must understand the change dynamics within their particular school environment and work directly with teams throughout the district to manage the change process (Akpoveta, 2022). Change leaders are flexible in their role, seizing opportunities, responding to stakeholders, and allowing their actions to be informed by context (OECD 2016). Being a responsive change leader is foundational to a principal’s role. The structured, process-oriented action steps of their role as change managers can move forward smoothly and have the intended impact (Akpoveta, 2022).

Change leadership’s second element of change is making a case for change and creating urgency (Fredburg & Pregmark, 2022). School leaders must be uniquely able to remind the school community of their vision to educate students while garnering positive outcomes. This can be done by identifying gaps in the current state and addressing them with faculty, students, and other partners. A sense of urgency is the action required to present the need for change. Creating a sense of urgency simply identifies that the current system, product, service, or whatever needs to change is no longer the best option (Carpen, 2021). Developing a shared understanding is not enough to make change happen, especially in a reform state; there also must be a sense of urgency to address the identified gaps (Akpoveta, 2022). For change to be a shared

imperative and for resulting efforts to be meaningful and sustained, stakeholders across the school must believe sincerely that these gaps must be addressed deliberately, systematically, and immediately. The sense of urgency created by a change leader allows for establishing a vision that fosters change (O'Day & Smith, 2016).

Change leadership's third element requires leaders to begin with a vision for change and communicate it. John Kotter, *Leading Change* (1996) wrote, "Without an appropriate vision, a transformation effort can easily dissolve into a list of confusing, incompatible, and time-consuming projects that go in the wrong direction or nowhere at all" (p. 7). An essential task for change leaders is to have all stakeholders coalesce on an agreement that a vision of success includes adaptive outcomes. This is critical for one reason. The shared vision serves as a hedge against two of the biggest pitfalls leading to incomplete or unsuccessful change attempts: (1) lack of focus on the dynamics of change, leading to a compliance-oriented adoption of new processes, and (2) lack of resources or authority to successfully challenge old practices and build the commitment and capacity for a new way of working (Akpoveta, 2022). A clear vision will motivate stakeholders because they will see the benefits they can expect from the change (Carpen, 2021). For change leaders, a vision represents a change in the status quo and moves an organization or system toward something more positive. It points to a new way of doing things that are better than how things are done in the past (Issah 2018).

In a change environment, creating coherence is the fourth element. In schools, for example, the main problem is not the absence of innovations but the presence of too many disconnected, episodic, piecemeal, and superficially adorned projects (Flood, 2021; Fullen, 2002). When change is mandated and externally driven, contextual alignment is a necessity. School leaders must work to provide coherence related to initiatives and district priorities, as the

perception of misalignment can seek to undermine it (Lindvall & Ryve, 2019). Coherence allows for the vision and action steps to align, enacting the change needed. Coherence is not an end but a cyclical process in a healthy organization and is a fundamental task of a change leader (Hay, 2017). To be effective, coherence must be shared and consists of four interactive components: focusing direction, cultivating collaborative cultures, deepening learning, and securing accountability (Fullen & Kirtman, 2019). Fullen and Quinn (2016) also stipulated that coherence should not be static but continuously evolving with the system's needs.

Change leadership's fifth element is understanding how change affects others (Issah, 2018). Strategies for school leaders leading change include seeking substantive input in the design phase, providing opportunities for deep engagement, training in the rollout phase, and ensuring ongoing support through implementation (Change Leaders, 2019). The implementation process should be deliberate, supported, and aligned with both broad goals and reality on the ground. Salerno and Brock (2008) as cited in Change Leaders (2019), have shown that individuals experiencing change frequently move through predictable phases in their response to that change, from perceptions of loss and doubt to increasing familiarity and discomfort with the change. Managing mandated change by integrating it with the local context's priorities can enable leaders, teachers, and schools to work more creatively with mandated reform (Clement, 2014). School leaders are tasked with interpreting policy measures for stakeholders and articulating how these policies relate to the school reform agenda. If leaders and other champions maintain momentum and engagement in the change, individuals move into discovery and understanding, where the change begins to make sense (Change Leaders, 2019).

For change leaders to maintain efforts, they must spread success, the sixth element. One of the most crucial leadership actions a school leader must make in leading change is identifying

change agents to carry important transformational work forward (Acton, 2020). School leaders should identify staff and other stakeholders who are enthusiastic about innovation, embrace the vision, and have a high level of credibility and respect with peers. These stakeholders have a keen process of setting short-term targets and celebrating the short-term wins while articulating how they are part of the long-term goals (Steinmann et al., 2018). As leaders encounter roadblocks and resistance, they know that change is non-linear and can initiate well-intended debates (Sartori et al., 2018). Change leaders must spread the success of their efforts to create continued support for their vision (Change Leaders, 2019). This is developed when school leadership can rapidly spread innovations and new ideas to others. To support the thought of coherence, principals must identify change agents to carry out the transformational work alongside the principal (Wallace Foundation, 2013). John Kotter's (1998) research highlighted that change projects can fail because victory is declared too early. Quick wins are examples of what can be achieved on the road to long-term change by setting a few high-priority goals with visible payoffs and using early success to gain momentum (Giovani & Rodriguez, 2017). While these "wins" are limited in scope, they are high-priority, not peripheral, elements of organization performance and can streamline the school's success efforts

Change leadership's seventh element is to incorporate change into the school culture. Every organization has a culture, history, and underlying set of unwritten expectations that shape everything about the school (Zepeda, 2015). A school culture influences the ways people think, feel, and act. Understanding and shaping the culture is key to a school's success in promoting staff and student learning (Lewis et al., 2016; Peterson, 2002). Change leaders know that for significant change to occur, they must examine the values, assumptions, ways of thinking, administration styles, paradigms, and approaches within the school (Kejellstrom et al., 2020).

While changing professional culture is challenging, Reeves (2006) believed that cultural change is both possible and crucial. It is critical in any organization, including schools, where the stakeholders use the word culture as “a rhetorical talisman to block leadership initiatives, stifle innovation, and maintain the status quo” (p. 93). Leaders must build a professional culture of change if they hope to implement ideas, strategies, and programs to improve our schools.

Leaders need to embody, model, and overtly talk about the enterprise's values and keep everyone focused on the pivotal urgency of improving student learning (Redding & Corbett, 2018). While changing professional culture is challenging, a school's culture is a powerful force that will work for or against improvement efforts (OECD, 2016). For example, a school with persistent and chronic low achievement has, almost by definition, spiraled into a negative culture that contributes to and is worsened by its failures (Carter & Nick, 2018). Rapid improvement, then, requires a culture shift, an enterprise that requires changes in mindsets, norms, and attitudes, which is difficult but essential (Redding & Corbett, 2018).

Finally, change leaders must also focus on personal leadership. Personal leadership is a leader's ability to lead others effectively while being aware of their responses to change and maintaining focus and resilience (Change Leaders, 2019). Rather than seeing this as a weakness in leadership or an inherited risk, personal leadership should pose the opportunity to model transparent, empathetic leadership for the school community and all involved stakeholders (Dillion & Bourke, 2016). Knowledge required for expert, practical problem-solving is situated and acquired under specific conditions, including participation with others in authentic, non-routine activities (Leithwood et al., 2020). These authentic activities are situated in the social and physical contexts of the school, community, and district and, therefore, must be accounted for in

problem-solving and must be represented in the knowledge structures stored by the principal (Leithwood et al., 2020).

Instructional Leadership

The instructional leadership model refers to the role and the functions of school leadership to employ different management tasks with regard to teaching and learning (Xhomara, 2019). Historically, the term instructional leadership comes from the effective schools movement (Lachlan-Hache, 2017). The instructional leader makes instruction the school's top priority and attempts to bring that vision to realization to include deeper involvement in the core business of schooling, which is teaching and learning. According to Xhomara (2019), the instructional leadership role includes (a) developing mission and goals, (b) managing the educational production function, (c) promoting an academic learning climate, and (d) developing a supportive work environment. Instructional leaders are described as leading from a combination of expertise and charisma focused primarily on improving student learning outcomes. Addressing academic achievement requires adapting leadership behavior to address the diverse needs of stakeholders (Templeton et al., 2016).

Despite the moniker of "instructional leader" being frequently ascribed to principals (Barnett & Aagaard, 2007), the critical role of instructional leadership is generally understood to be too large and important a task to be assigned to a single leader (Hallinger, 2005). One obstacle to principals exerting instructional leadership is the demand on their time originating from non-instructional issues (Klar, 2013). The principal demonstrates instructional leadership by providing coaching and mentoring to those teachers who require it and professional development opportunities that allow teachers to explore best practices in teaching (Brolund, 2016).

According to Brolund (2016), the goal of instructional leadership is for the principal to work closely with teachers to increase student achievement.

Scholars have noted that school leaders in urban districts are confronted by more distractions than their peers in nonurban high schools, resulting in even less instructional leadership being provided to teachers in these schools (Portin, 2000; Resnick & Glennan, 2002). The task of instructional leadership is mammoth in itself and requires a coordinated effort to ensure its implementation. School leaders experiencing the urgency of quick improvement must leverage all of their resources, including expert teachers and other identified staff, to carry out this task. Instructional leadership directly correlates to distributive leadership (Demarco, 2018). Instructional leadership appears to be illustrated through two aspects that provide school leaders with the ability to create a more structural position for the school environment (Pont, 2020).

The first aspect of instructional leadership reflects task behavior, including creating school targets to determine appropriate job descriptions and duties. Principals are required to build a vision for improving student achievement, and they expect that teachers will accept the vision and apply it consistently in their classrooms (duPlessis, 2013). Principals exert a strong influence on student learning and achievement as instructional leaders through their ability to impact the types of organizational school features necessary for high-quality teaching and learning (Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Leithwood et al., 2010; Leithwood et al. 2020; Robinson et al., 2008; Supovitz et al., 2010). Facilitating a high-quality learning experience for students is key by creating a high-quality instructional program, developing and monitoring curriculum, instruction, and assessment, and creating personalized learning environments that are safe and orderly (Hitt & Tucker, 2016).

The second aspect of instructional leadership reflects relationship behaviors, specifically understanding which relationships with employees are arranged and which employees are motivated regarding instruction (Gulcan, 2012). Principals exert influence over factors such as school climate and teacher working conditions and make human capital (i.e., teacher hiring) and professional development decisions that indirectly influence student learning outcomes (Cannata et al., 2017; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012). Distributing instructional leadership beyond established administrative roles to new leadership roles and teams responsible for performing, coordinating, and managing all of the aspects is crucial (Elmore, 2000; Puerach et al., 2019; Spillane, 2006).

Entrepreneurial Leadership

Entrepreneurial leadership is a leadership theory that arose from the existing literature on leadership and entrepreneurship abilities to adapt to dynamic changes in markets and motivate direct followers to achieve organizational goals (Gupta et al., 2004; Renko et al., 2015; Simba & Thai, 2019). It has been admitted as creativity- and innovation-oriented leadership theory (Fontana & Musa, 2017; Renko et al., 2015). In the face of ongoing school budget cuts, increasing student numbers and national educational policy environments that demand more from schools, like it or not, school leaders are being forced to be much more market-oriented in their thinking and ways of being than at any other time before (Miller, 2018). Entrepreneurial leadership represents a leadership style that is creative and innovative (Selvaraja et al., 2021). In addition, entrepreneurial leaders act as activists and catalysts to motivate others to perform (Atwater, 2020). Entrepreneurial leadership is considered a leading solution in situations where reform is mandated because of entrepreneurs' positive influence on creativity and economic growth (Lynch, 2016). Lynch (2016) argued that if the education system is seeking to modernize

its efforts, school leaders can draw valuable lessons from entrepreneurs to be innovative, motivated, and goal oriented. The essential tasks identified under entrepreneurial leadership are allocating resources, coordinating cross-sectional tasks, and creating network structures. Implementing entrepreneurial leadership is, first and foremost, a task for the strategic leader of an organization (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2015).

Entrepreneurial leadership calls for strengthening, transferring, and coordinating information and instructions to prevent mismanagement of resources between levels of educational governance (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2015). The school leadership team, using the entrepreneurial framework is supposed to examine critically and decide whether the pedagogical content and its respective learning objectives have been achieved (Caldwell, 1998), and whether the achievement of objectives and use of resources (e.g., human, material, technological) within the agreements are consistent with each other (Brauckmann-Sajkiewicz & Pashiardis, 2020). Pedagogical content is the knowledge teachers develop over time, and through experience, about how to teach particular content in particular ways to lead to enhanced student understanding (Read & Kaiser, 2020). The entrepreneur leader's field of action is not limited to the public school itself. Still, they transform surpluses of seemingly limited resources and innovative public-private partnerships into pedagogical capital that considers the needs of teachers and students (Brauckmann-Sajkiewicz et al., 2020). The entrepreneurial leader also knows how to reconcile educational/pedagogical requirements and resources based on their competence and expertise in leadership, administration, and business arrangements, which include 'outside' forces and resources as well (Brauckmann-Sajkiewicz et al., 2020).

In addition to pedagogical qualities, school principals now need leadership and management skills to successfully handle tasks such as personnel selection and development of

marketing and strategizing processes (Brauckmann-Sajkiewicz & Pashiardis, 2020).

Establishing a cross-sector network that also arranges partnerships between managers from business and school leaders is necessary (Dezhgahi et al., 2014). An entrepreneurial leader gets a group to truly operate as a team, creating collaboration and high performance that sparks more innovation (Langowitz et al., 2019). Schools have become a multifaceted pedagogical action field with many cross-sectional leadership tasks that resemble business tasks (Brauckmann-Sajkiewicz & Pashiardis, 2020). There is a new perspective which (re-)opens a field of more productive tensions between both education and economic efficiency and pedagogical and business-oriented mind-sets (Basson & Mestry, 2019; OECD, 2017), and consequently between entrepreneurial and pedagogical leadership (Brauckmann & Schwarz, 2014) that allow for cross-sectional tasks of economics and pedagogy. Entrepreneurial leadership entails influencing and directing group members' performance toward achieving organizational goals that involve recognizing and exploiting entrepreneurial opportunities that can benefit improvement efforts (Renko et al., 2015).

Entrepreneurial leaders are creative; they develop an innovation climate in the workplace and then persuade their team members to work creatively and collaboratively (Huang et al., 2014). This structure allows leaders to increase their team members' knowledge-sharing behaviors and empower them to utilize inner and outside information at maximum capacity, increasing their capacities to develop new ideas (Carmeli et al., 2013). Entrepreneurial leaders can adapt and overcome the dynamic nature of the organizations (Bagheri & Harrison, 2020). In addition, they inspire and direct team members to accomplish organizational goals that entail opportunity exploration and exploitation, which lend to the organization's structure (Fontana & Musa, 2017). Entrepreneurial leadership requires appropriate and effective techniques to interact

with the community, including students, prospective students, parents, businesses, and other stakeholders (Miller, 2018). School leaders must be steeped in the appropriate marketing techniques and “business thinking” with strict performance targets and exacting accountability requirements to reach and connect with all members of the school community (Eacott, 2011; Miller, 2018).

Moreover, school leaders are increasingly responsible for strategy formulation, which must be translated into pedagogically relevant goals and is an aspect of entrepreneurial leadership (Bruackmann-Sajkiewick & Pashardis, 2020). Entrepreneurial leadership has been emphasized to create a supportive environment for change and innovation at schools (Pihie et al., 2014). They also can incorporate actions and behaviors that help them look outside the school environment to build alliances with those forces which, potentially, could be considered allies toward a more efficient and effective implementation of the schools’ objectives and goals (Bruackmann-Sajkiewick et al., 2020). Through the decision-making role, the school leader operates like an entrepreneur who inspires change and innovation and the attitude that tries new things and methods (Stevenson & Jarillo, 1990). Educational policymakers appreciate entrepreneurial leaders' economic thinking and actions, not just pedagogical ones (Blake & Mestry, 2014). These leaders are characterized as individuals with (a) a need for achievement, an internal locus of control, (c) risk-taking propensity, and (d) a passion and desire to innovate (Feit, 2016).

The need for achievement connects to successful outcomes for entrepreneurial leaders (Augustina & Fauzia, 2021). Leaders are usually known for their continual learning behavior that helps them sustain and achieve desired objectives in the form of success. According to Lazur (2020), the need for achievement is the need to succeed and the push for personal

accomplishment. Everyone competes against themselves and holds standards that do not involve competition with others. Luzar further stated that entrepreneurial leaders set challenging and realistic goals and crave feedback on how well they are progressing. He believed that the feedback allows the entrepreneur to improve performance and push their standards even higher. The need-based theory of motivation developed by David C. McClelland is closely associated with learning theory as he believes that needs are learned or acquired by the kinds of events people experience in their environment and culture (McClelland, 2014). McClelland found that people who acquire a particular need behave differently from those who do not have it. This is the drive to excel, achieve a set “standard, and strive to succeed. In other words, the need for achievement is a behavior directed towards competition with a standard of excellence (McClelland's Need for Achievement Theory, 2014).

For entrepreneurial leaders, the internal locus of control presupposes personal responsibility that drives them to pursue high achievements in challenging environments (Sun et al., 2020). The theory of “locus of control” or “internal versus external control of reinforcement” was introduced by Rotter (1954; 1966) and further studied in correlation with individual motivation, mobilization of internal resources, learning, work adjustment, and organizational commitment (Dumitriu et al., 2014). Locus of control is one aspect of personality. Entrepreneurial leaders with an internal locus of control can adapt their leadership style to achieve objectives effectively and efficiently (Sager, 2018). In addition, internal locus of control is associated with individuals gathering more information, improving their decision-making process, effectiveness, and achievement while benefitting from increased self-efficacy (Boone et al., 2005; Sager, 2018).

Risk-taking has been seen as a defining property of the entrepreneur (Block et al., 2015; Cantillon, 1734; Knight, 1921; Schumpeter, 1934; McClelland, 1961; Hisrich, 1986; Hisrich & Peters, 1998). Entrepreneurial leaders maintain a result-oriented disposition, as they can act effectively to get things done by executing their long- and short-term plans through managing risk, finances and effectively negotiating (Kassai, 2022). Risk-taking is an integral part of the entrepreneurial process. It is concerned with the inclination of entrepreneurial leaders to accept the fear of uncertainty, launch their venture, and own the responsibility for future contingencies (Ahmed & Harrison, 2021; Chen, 2007). Unlike managers, entrepreneurial leaders are risk-takers who engage in various activities at different phases of the creation and development process (Ahmed & Harrison, 2021; Thomas & Mueller, 2000).

Entrepreneurial leaders see the world differently than others, enabling them to innovate, discover new customer needs, and attract talents and resources to their business (Kassai, 2022). According to Hussain and Li (2022), a leadership style that generates a suitable comparative environment for entrepreneurship and innovation in the market leads to success. They foster innovation and adaptation in changing environments (Renko et al., 2015). Innovativeness is the ability and tendency of entrepreneurial leaders to think creatively and develop novel and practical ideas relating to opportunity recognition, resource utilization, and problem-solving (Chen, 2007; Gupta et al., 2004; Pihie & Bagheri, 2014; Rae, 2007). School principals need to acquire and practice entrepreneurial leadership characteristics to improve their school's effectiveness and facilitate the process of school innovation (Pihie & Bagheri, 2014).

Leadership is an essential element in promoting effectiveness in organizations. Education improvement scholars highlight how the role of school leaders has evolved in response to changing governance trends, from management to accountability and now into professionalism

(Pont, 2020). School leaders who build and maintain momentum for rapid school improvement are integral to the successful turnaround puzzle (The Center on School Turnaround, 2018). A leader's influence on the success of this comprehensive reform as a model for improvement is crucial and necessary to deepen the understanding of the process and reform efforts (Martin & Samels, 2009; Ong, 2015).

Takeovers

Reform efforts for urban school districts have taken the form of school/district takeovers (Morel, 2018). The rationale for taking this bold action has been (1) the prolonged dismal performance of urban districts by both academic indicators (such as standardized test performance, suspensions, expulsions, special education placement, dropout rates, graduation rates, and teacher absenteeism) and leadership and management issues (including financial mismanagement and bureaucratic waste, and (2) the apparent inability or unwillingness of the existing school governance system to respond to this increasingly desperate situation (Green & Carl, 2000). In this model, the school system in question is viewed as inept or broken, and the existing governance cannot make significant changes toward improvement. Takeovers, as a way to reform school districts, began with large urban districts, including Jersey City, New Jersey, East St. Louis, Illinois, Washington D.C., Cleveland, Ohio, and Chicago, Illinois (Oluwole & Green III, 2009). While located in different states, these school districts have all topped the reform list. Many of their commonalities include a high concentration of poor and non-white students, especially African American males, and often a history of low academic performance, high dropout rates, financial mismanagement, and other negative that create the conditions for such reforms as takeovers (Morel, 2018; Wong & Shen, 2003).

Takeovers in urban settings seek to radically change how instructional delivery and governance are done to improve academic performance and ensure systems function efficiently. Takeovers of urban school systems share at least one characteristic: a perceived need to install new leadership into educationally and financially troubled districts (Green & Carl, 2000). At least 21 districts have transferred control from an elected board to a mayor, a state legislature, or an appointed oversight board (Reinhard, 1998). Efficiency and accountability top the list for school reform action when it applies to budgeting and decision-making (Cusick et al., 2021). Having one person or a smaller controlled group over an elected school board allows for quick decisions, absent bureaucracy, and depoliticizing urban school governance (Bowman, 2013). Bureaucracies have several excellent aspects. They are designed to ensure equal opportunity and efficiency through a meritocratic structure. Meritocracy implies that employment and advancement should be based on shown and documented abilities rather than nepotism or chance. Despite excellent intentions and a talk about "fair educational opportunity," disadvantaged children are rarely taught properly in schools (Shields et al., 2017). This failure was systematic rather than sporadic. Talk about "keeping schools out of politics" has frequently worked to hide genuine power imbalances and privilege patterns (Drummond, 2015).

Measuring students' academic performance is a critical factor in utilizing takeovers as reform. Academic performance relates to the accomplishment of learning objectives and the acquisition of skills and competencies (York et al., 2015). This is applied by different instruments that measure qualitative and quantitative data relative to achievement factors held to a series of principles and can be relied upon to produce accurate findings (Chingos, 2018). When used correctly, they provide educators and administrators with precise data. Some common educational metrics are raw scores, percentile ranks, and standard scores. The standardized test

has been questioned and poses at least two potential problems. First, there is a lack of specificity around just how poor test scores should be and for how long, which will, in turn, dictate a takeover (Richmond, 2013). Test scores have served as the trigger to engage reformists in the improvement process. Urban school districts tend to score lower on standardized tests than non-urban districts, highlighting urban schools' constraints and challenges (Ramlackhan & Wang, 2019). According to Morel (2018), when takeovers are implemented, there is an expectation of improving quickly. Himelfarb (2019) brought the long debate regarding standardized testing and its bias against non-white students. Standardized tests have a limited and simplistic means of assessing school and student performance that ignores a much more complex process of learning and assessment (Ziebarth, 1998). According to Frost et al. (2021), many factors have contributed to why African Americans do not do well on these tests since the creation of standardized testing. External factors that were shown to affect Latino and African American student test scores include poverty, racial segregation, inadequate funding for schools, cultural bias (i.e., test questions that often require specific, upper-middle-class white, cultural knowledge), and stereotype threat (Hart et al., 2015).

Takeover Strategy in Ohio

Academic Distress Commissions (ADCs) were established by the Ohio legislature in 2015, creating a takeover process for school districts that received an overall “F” grade on state report cards for three consecutive years (Tebben, 2021). This process implements a financial supervisor (CEO) and takes away the decision-making ability of the local board of education (Tebben, 2021). In July 2015, Am. Sub. House Bill 70 created Ohio Revised Code (ORC) section 3302.10, which requires the superintendent of public instruction to establish an academic distress commission (ADC) for a school district that meets a specific set of conditions. It also

describes how the school district will be governed and managed. The statute became effective in October 2015. To date, three academic distress commissions have been created. The first ADC was established in Youngstown City School District in February 2016, the second in Lorain City School District in July 2017, and the third in East Cleveland City School District in September 2018 (Ohio Department of Education, 2019). The ADC policy idea is not unprecedented in Ohio law or other state laws. For example, in Ohio, ORC section 118.05 allows for a financial planning and supervision commission appointment for any municipal corporation, county, or township in which a fiscal emergency condition exists (as defined by ORC section 118.04), which has served as a basis for takeovers as well. Finally, ORC section 3311.71, enacted in 1997 and limited to the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, creates an alternative mayoral control governance structure. Under this statute, the mayor of the City of Cleveland appoints the school board members, thereby giving the mayor control over the school district's activities, and avoiding state takeover (Encyclopedia of Cleveland History, 2018).

School takeover and districtwide turnaround have been rigorously studied and generated significant student achievement improvements (Harris & Larsen, 2016; Harris & Larsen, 2018). Federal legislation such as the Every Student Succeeds Act provides states with greater autonomy over turnaround policies and requires them to use federal funds for turnaround policies backed by federally-defined evidence standards (Levesque, 2016; West, 2016). States, therefore, have a substantial need for research on state-level takeover and turnaround policies. School turnaround is a strategy under takeovers that refer to a dramatic improvement in performance created by various changes within an organization in a short period of time (Waters et al., 2003).

Urban Principal Characteristics in a Takeover

School reform often takes place in urban districts (Ravitch, 2016). Urban districts have consistently experienced high poverty rates. The 2015 poverty rate was 19.6% in large cities, 17.2% in rural areas, 16% in small metro areas, and 11.2% in the suburbs (Kneebone 2022). Urban is synonymous with educational reform and policy discussion but lacks a defined meaning related to the specific context of school. Its multifaceted purpose may explain its continued evolution. For underperforming urban school systems, the problem usually lies with the inability to sustain existing reform efforts and initiatives (Lynch, 2016). The leadership characteristics and skills are unique to the context of the job. Over the past decade, “change leadership” has emerged as an essential framework for leaders facing massive reform efforts, especially those in urban settings (Center for School Reform, 2005). Urban principals must implement a transformational rather than a transactional approach to execute reform. As leaders of change, these school leaders must specifically establish a direction, align people and resources to that direction, continue to motivate and maintain the focus and anticipate, and address problems that can derail the direction (Christensen, 1993; Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Fullan, 2001; Leithwood et al., 1993; Leithwood & Steinbach, 1995; Neumann et al., 2000; Rallis & Goldring, 2000).

Because school leaders in urban settings are asked to navigate school district bureaucracy and community relations, research suggests that effective urban principals need to rethink their relationship with parents and the community (Goldring & Sullivan, 1996; Keyes & Soleil, 2001; Sanders, 1999; Sanders & Epstein, 1998). Principals must balance the traditional approach of buffering the school from negative external forces with a strategic openness and purposefully create more porous boundaries between the school and its environment (Goldring & Sullivan,

1996). Urban leaders are subject to cultural pressures that demand that power remains hidden or ‘unobtrusive,’ exacerbating existing bureaucratic structures (Lumby, 2017).

Richard Boyatzis (1989) came up with three factors: individual competencies, job demands, and the organizational environment that contribute to the effective job performance of urban school leaders amidst reform efforts.

Managing the organizational environment reflects the principal’s external role in the urban context, boundary spanning, and buffering aspects. According to Hopkins et al. (2007), effective urban leaders must ensure the safety and security of everyone in and around the school environment; connect students and their families to health and human services; and protect the school from the chaos in which they must operate (i.e., state mandates, temporary superintendents, school board politics and central office turf wars). There has to be an ability to anticipate or “look down the line” to determine how the environment is expected to change to make decisions and take actions that promote desirable outcomes and circumvent disruptions in the future (Duchek, 2019). Urban principals are responsible for educating significantly higher proportions of economically disadvantaged, minority, special needs, and second language learner students (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2020). Yet they work in a largely unsupportive external environment characterized by frequent changes in superintendent and school board leadership, entrenched bureaucracy, prescriptive union-management agreements, high student mobility rates, inadequate and unstable resource base, declining public confidence, and increased competition for students, particularly from charter schools (Williams, 2008).

The job demands of principals are tied to the changing educational context (Portin, 2000). Three leadership frameworks are particularly relevant to the job demands of the urban principal. Instructional leadership, the most frequently cited, describes principals who are focused on

academic goals; hold high expectations for staff performance and student achievement; observe and work directly with teachers to improve instruction; minimize disruptions to ensure efficient use of instructional time; creatively use resources; monitor student achievement results and use data to guide planning (Bolman & Heller, 1995; Bossert et al., 1982; Davis & Thomas, 1989; Hall & Hord, 1984; Leithwood & Duke, 1999; Leithwood et al., 1990; Levine & Lezotte, 1990; Leithwood & Montgomery, 1986; Marzano et al., 2005; Persell & Cookson, 1982; Reeves, 2004;). The second framework is change leadership, which requires that leaders establish a direction, align people and resources to that direction, continue to motivate and maintain the focus and anticipate and address problems that can derail the direction (Christensen, 1993; Fullan, 1996, 2001; Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Leithwood et al., 1993; Leithwood & Steinbach, 1995; Neumann et al., 2012; Rallis & Goldring, 2000). The third framework is entrepreneurial leadership. This framework allows school leaders to organize rather than manage their schools for results. They can analyze the needs of their students, design a staffing plan to meet those needs, arrange a schedule to fit the program, and choose relevant teaching materials. They are willing to take risks; they are problem solvers rather than rule followers. This framework in urban education requires decentralization, providing more autonomy to school leaders in return for accountability (Hess, 2006; Ouchi, 2003; Williams, 2006). These frameworks collectively outline a set of principles defining what leaders must know and must do. It holistically addresses leadership at the individual, team, and organizational levels (Leadership Frameworks for New Leaders, 2016).

According to Marzano et al. (2005), The “principal responsibilities” include affirmation, change agent, contingent rewards, communication, culture, discipline, flexibility, focus, ideals/beliefs, input, intellectual stimulation, involvement in curriculum, instruction, and

assessment; knowledge of curriculum, instruction and assessment; monitoring/evaluating; optimizer; order; outreach; relationships; resources; situational awareness and visibility which foster change in urban environments. These responsibilities are mutually exclusive and are meant to exact change. Urban leaders require continued professional learning targeted to their needs and experiences within their unique settings and contexts. While there are many important topics to cover, the change process should be an essential component of any principal development program (Petzko, 2008).

Turnaround as a Reform Strategy

Finally, “turnaround” is goal-directed in an educational context that serves as a strategy for school takeovers. It proposes that a school’s entire population must shift to nourishing and helpful roles, including students, faculty, and staff (Graham, 2013). The turnaround model has been a significant strategy for underperforming schools since the 1990s. Turnaround schools have replaced the old business-inspired schools, growing this trend of a new education system (Peck & Reitzug, 2012). This strategy has been used to close the academic achievement gaps between identified groups of students. Turnaround as a process refers to transforming underperforming schools into efficient ones (Chapman & Muijs, 2013; Deaton, 2009; Ong, 2015). In these circumstances, turnaround leaders must be motivated by the necessity for the school to improve, change drastically, or shut down (Salazar, 2015). Mass Insight Education (2011) described the turnaround process as a dramatic and synthetic medium in a low-performing school that could bear fruit within two years and prepares the school for the long process of becoming a high-performing school. Its goal is the transformation of underperforming schools into efficient schools (Chapman & Muijs, 2013; Deaton, 2009; Ong, 2015).

Comprehensive reform which would include parts of systemic reform could accomplish this goal.

The strategies of turnaround linked with school reform have a consistent focus on leadership which can help improve the systems in the lowest-achieving schools (Jensen & Farmer, 2013; Salazar, 2015). According to Salazar (2015), these leaders facing reform environments must have a sense of enhanced coordination and the ability to strengthen moral values and provide further support to an organization facing difficulties. Leaders combine both transformational and heroic leadership with a business sense of accountability. Other researchers have concluded that a successful school reform leader creates a shared vision of the future, motivates others to work collectively to achieve goals, and organizes overall objectives into essential tasks (Deal & Peterson, 2009; Duke, 2009; Leithwood et al., 2010).

Schools facing significant reform have standards by which they are measured. The failure to meet or exceed these standards allows for a system of accountability to mandate change. Several states have created performance-based accountability systems which combine standards, assessments, and accountability into a unified set of laws and regulations (Stecher et al., 2010). As these systems exist, some states have not allowed them to become statutory but rather strong directives from their governing bodies (DePascale, 2018). States like Ohio have adopted law governing school reform, which has been revised, including takeover and reconstitution provisions to foster improvement.

Takeover provisions are where most states have invested heavily in developing accountability plans. Fuhrman (1999) outlined in her review of state accountability studies that the challenges are inherent in designing a fair system. For example, states must determine satisfactory progress, how performance will be measured, and what they can reasonably ask

schools to address. The takeover provision is expected to be a fair system to track the progress of taken-over schools (Community Training and Assistance Center, 2000; Maranto, 2005; McRobbie, 1998; Useem, 2005; Wong et al., 2004). In creating a takeover provision, states must determine satisfactory progress, how performance will be measured, and what they can reasonably ask schools to address.

The reconstitution provision tries to leverage the human capital in schools by replacing large percentages of a school's administrators, teachers, and support staff with individuals who are presumably more capable and committed (Malen & Rice, 2016). For example, before the passage of the NCLB Act, Maryland was a state that developed an accountability system that included state reconstitution as an option for persistently low-performing schools (Rhim, 2004). However, the legislation did not specify a timetable for state reconstitution; the state department annually reviewed school report cards and then consulted with the state superintendent about which schools to reconstitute. Reconstitution involves creating a new philosophy, developing a new curriculum, and hiring new staff at a low-performing school. Some states and school districts include other components within this approach, such as reducing teacher/student ratios in low-performing schools (Zieberth, 2014).

Educational Reform Types

Educational reform is a concept that has been immersed in education policy for more than 50 years, yielding an ambiguous image. Educational reform reflects the current condition of a school district and how the district has chosen to address that condition. (Goertz et al., 1995). As part of President L. B. Johnson's War on Poverty in 1965, federal legislation enacted Head Start as a reform effort. Much of the government's thinking was influenced by the research that poverty had a traumatic impact on education (Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center,

2018). A key tenet of the legislation was to be culturally responsive to the communities it served (ECLKC, 2018). Since the release of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, education reform has been a primary focus among municipal, state, and federal policymakers. States reacted to this push for education reform in the mid-1980s by raising high school graduation coursework criteria, adopting and expanding elements in achieving, and achieving greater expectations for prospective teachers (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2003). Later in the decade, a counter-movement of "bottom-up" reform concentrated on school reform, restructuring, and teacher professionalization (Goertz, 1996). The "top-down" mandates of the 1980s did little to alter instruction content (mainly its focus on basic skills) or the dominant notions of teaching and learning. Some argued that fragmented and contradictory policies diverted teachers' attention and provided little or no support for the type of professional learning required.

Reform has become a label attached to educational entities that consistently engage in continuous improvement regarding academics and structures. One such reform is systemic. When approaching systemic reform, educational entities have to embody three integral components: (1) the promotion of ambitious student outcomes for all students; (2) alignment of policy approaches and the actions of various policy institutions to promote such outcomes; and (3) restructuring the governance system to support improved achievement (Culpeper, J., 2018). Smith and O'Day (1991) argued that neither the top-down reforms nor their antithesis, the bottom-up reforms, of the 1980s would improve schools or learning. Instead, Smith and O'Day (1991) argued that a coherent, systematic strategy that takes advantage of all of the resources of each level of the system adds content to the restructuring movement establishing expectations that all students will acquire a deep understanding of subject matter and complex thinking skills.

Systemic reform has proven to be a fragmented, multi-layered system that exists as a systemic barrier to educational change and systemic change. “Systemic reform relates to changing the entire educational system to serve students better and said educational purposes” (Smith & O’Day, 1991 p. 237). Recognition of the limitations of systemic change has even begun to appear in the popular press as newspapers, such as the *New York Times*, that have highlighted disappointing performance and widening achievement gaps among U.S. students in international tests (Superfine & Paige, 2022).

On the other hand, comprehensive reform is a coordinated effort to overhaul all parts and systems of a school’s operation (Goertz, 1996). It integrates curriculum, instruction, professional development, parental involvement, classroom management, and school management efforts (Starisina, 2020). The visibility of comprehensive reform offers a chance to discern future actions to ensure that transformative practices lead to real and substantive change rather than simply a swing of the pendulum, a metaphor that Eisner (2005) employed to identify efforts that feel like movement yet “move without going any place” (p. 148). Because of its focus on proficiency-based learning and assessment, students, teachers, and administrators are making a fundamental commitment to a learning system that stresses the importance of learning (Tinkler & Tinkler, 2019). School reform can be emergent through systemic or comprehensive change, depending on the improvement needs of the district.

Conclusion

Education reform has remained at the forefront of public education and has become more centralized as states and the federal government have taken on a more significant role legislatively (Anagnostopoulos & Rutledge, 2007; Henig, 2013; Peterson, 2016; Wong & Shen, 2013). Reforming school curriculum and pedagogy, improving student achievement, and

leveraging strong leadership are conditions resulting from legislative efforts attributed to reform (Bhopal & Shain, 2016). Implementing actions like takeovers and turnarounds in the business, nonprofit, and public sectors show that the strategy can dramatically improve results and increase equity. While not all efforts succeed, it's imperative to identify the pitfalls. To reform education and ensure academic achievement for all students, the focus must continue on equity and how reform measures are implemented. A clear solution for successful reform is to commit to one or two broad goals: assessment and the other leadership capacity that allows districts to operationalize the actions that are meaningful for them. These agreed-upon goals then turn into targets or outcomes that move the needle for student achievement, fulfilling federal legislation's mandates (Let's Go Learn, 2021).

Reform in education (Bridgeland & Orszag, 2013; Gueron & Rolston, 2013; Slavin, 2008; 2013, 2017, 2020; Slavin & Cheung, 2017) can be summed up as policies in which educators and policymakers enact changes and monitor their effectiveness. These measures must be aligned with government requirements and at the statutory recommended pace. It is possible that states, particularly those with existing capacity and political will, might be better positioned than individual districts to develop a governance structure to manage this process (Marzano, 2003). Although reform approaches such as turnaround and takeover have resonated with districts across the country, continuity and stability are also crucial for sustaining reform. Many years of sustained implementation are necessary for reforms to yield lasting benefits (Doss & Akinniranye,, 2020).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

As stated in Chapter 1, this research aimed to identify the key leadership traits and experiences needed to successfully navigate federal and state reform efforts. To accomplish this, the following questions are pertinent:

1. How do long-standing, transformational school district leaders in Ohio, who were appointed to their positions through legislation, describe successful reform efforts?
2. In what manner do long-serving, transformational leaders in Ohio's school districts, who were appointed through legislation, depict the execution of successful reform endeavors?

Sub-questions include:

1. In leading educational reform, which leadership practices were identified as successful within school reform environment?
2. What are the primary leadership qualities that emerge for transformational leaders?
3. What outside factors do transformational leaders identify as having shaped their approaches to school reform in public urban school districts?
4. How do policy mandates, such as new graduation requirements, more rigorous standards, and demands for school accountability, shape leadership decisions?

These questions are significant because they address the gaps in the literature regarding the effective leadership characteristics and experiences needed for leaders to navigate school reform successfully. In the past, school effectiveness research has focused strongly on student academic outcomes; however, it can be argued that creating the conditions that promote greater school

effectiveness is a necessary but insufficient condition alone for successful school leadership (Day et al., 2020). Therefore, identifying the specific characteristics and experiences of successful transformative leaders engaged in reform efforts may help future administrators, school leaders, and boards of education address the growing need to identify future administrators. In addition, there is a growing demand for school leaders to manage increased expectations of the education system with more significant accountability pressures and an emphasis on raising standards and widening the social goals of schooling (Day et al.).

Research Methods

This was a qualitative study. A qualitative research approach allows the researcher to explore how participants understand their world (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). This study was designed to understand how long-standing, transformational school district leaders in Ohio, appointed to their positions through legislation, describe and implement mandated reform efforts by interviewing identified superintendents. Using interviews to form a case study as the primary data collection method, the researcher explored the leadership characteristics of superintendents in Ohio who engaged in reform efforts and have been in their positions for three or more years (Trochim et al., 2016).

Interviews were conducted in person and via zoom. Interview questions scrutinized school improvement documents like the district report card that institutes state mandates to understand better school leaders' decision-making capabilities and legislation that has been used to guide the districts' reform, while uncovering the leadership traits needed to enact change successfully. In addition, the researcher gathered data from direct observations, semi-structured interviews, and journal responses.

Role of the Researcher

A researcher is considered an ‘insider’ when he or she shares particular attributes with the study participants (Braun & Clarke, 2019). As a public school K-12 educator working in a district engaged in reform, I have a basic understanding of the improvement process and sanctioned reform mandates. After conducting in-depth interviews to gauge the leadership characteristics of long-standing, successful district leaders engaged in reform efforts, the researcher identified patterns and themes regarding leadership styles and characteristics. Finally, the researcher was the principal investigator. Data were gathered by conducting a cross-analysis to determine the dominant characteristics school transformational leaders should possess to succeed in school reform efforts.

As a qualitative researcher studying the leadership characteristics of longstanding, successful district leaders engaged in school reform, I must disclose my subjectivity and any bias I may have. My experience with education spans over 20 years as a student, teacher, and administrator. My work and school experience have occurred in public urban school settings where mandates and reform efforts have been constant. Currently, I work as a Middle and High School Principal and Assistant Superintendent who participates in improvement networks also attended by the superintendents I will interview. Before working eight years in my current district, I worked in two large urban school districts and one smaller urban/suburban school district, all of which have undergone school reform efforts.

My desire to successfully work in a district leading the change to exit reform status has been shaped by my experiences in districts undergoing mandated school reform efforts. Five years ago, I took an Executive Leadership Course through The Ohio State University Fisher School of Business and trained with the State Support Team (SST) 3 to become an internal

facilitator for district leadership teams. Given this experience, I have begun to understand the systems and processes that propel a district into mandated school reform and the leadership qualities needed to steer the district in the right direction. While my bias regarding the leadership qualities of a successful leader is clear because of my experience, my bias also inspired me to research the topic thoroughly. This research aimed to provide a resource for administrators like myself seeking to understand what type of leader it takes to navigate school-mandated reform efforts successfully.

The safeguards that were implemented include writing clear, neutral question statements to avoid eliciting a specific answer from participants or their response with a particular emotion (Mack et al., 2005). In addition, I verified outcomes with multiple data sources to support interpretations (Mack et al., 2005). Finally, I used my training from SST to identify leadership traits that align with processes and procedures that support school improvement.

Participants/Sample Subject

The research study aimed to gather perceptual data from superintendents of Ohio school districts to understand transformational leaders' leadership characteristics while engaging in reform efforts. The superintendents in this study led majority-minority school districts identified by the state of Ohio using the Ohio Schools Report Card as 'failing' districts needing to implement mandated reforms. My research had a sample size of four district superintendents. The student enrollments of these districts ranged from 800 to 5,000, with a poverty rate of at least 60%. The selected school districts were among the bottom 10% of academic performers in Ohio, comprising approximately 300 failing districts. The superintendents studied have been leading their districts for at least three years and have engaged with state leaders regarding school improvement measures and possible state takeover during their tenure.

The researcher used nonprobability purposive sampling, which allowed the researcher to develop a deep sense of the leadership capabilities needed to successfully navigate school and district reform from those currently engaged in the process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Rudestam & Newton, 2015). The main criterion for the sampling in this study was that the participant has served at least three years as a superintendent or Chief Executive Officer (CEO) in a public school system in Ohio engaged in school improvement efforts. The selection of participants was made from various districts in the state of Ohio as defined by the Ohio Department of Education's school reports card as on track for state takeover. While this qualitative research study involved purposive sampling, the small sample size made the generalization of results unlikely (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Data Collection

This qualitative research study used a triangulated data collection approach to gather information from multiple sources, including interviews and document analysis utilizing both the participants and the researcher's interpretive analysis from multiple documentary sources. Documents that were used for systematic evaluation as part of a study took a variety of forms (Bowen, 2009).

Documents that were analyzed included but were not limited to district report cards, improvement plans, strategic plans, district profiles, board agenda minutes and financial records. Interviews are a widely recognized method that allows the researcher to gather specific information from participants through one-on-one interactions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The sampling strategy for this study was to interview participants that have served at least three years as a Superintendent or Chief Executive Officer (CEO) in a public school system in Ohio engaged in school improvement efforts. The selection of participants was made from various districts in

Ohio as defined by the Ohio Department of Education's school reports card as on track for state takeover.

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016, p. 117), the key to getting good data from interviewing was to ask good questions. The type of questions asked of participants and how the questions are presented affect the information the researcher receives from the participants. The following questions have emerged from the initial research:

1. Please tell me about your decision to become a public school superintendent. What made you decide to lead a 'failing school district?'
2. Understanding the school improvement process is vital to enacting school improvement in Ohio. What barriers affected your ability to make positive change and academic growth?
3. Superintendents are required to be competent in education legislation policy to be effective in reform efforts. As you reflect on the interview process for your selection with your district, do any specific instances or questions related to school legislative policy come to mind?
4. With the superintendent turnover rate in Ohio ranging from 14-16%, it is clear that the job is demanding. What factors influenced your decision to take this challenging job?
5. We know from the literature that being involved in collaborative networks is an essential asset for someone leading school change. What networks have assisted you in your career?
6. What, if anything, did you find most challenging about being a superintendent under the auspices of school improvement?

7. School board and community relations are the responsibility of the superintendent to create and maintain. What strategies did you use to coalesce your board, community, and other stakeholders?
8. What specific skills and traits do you believe are needed for a transformational school leader who is actively involved in reform efforts to be successful?
9. The Ohio Department of Education has had many iterations of how they rank and identify the performance of school districts. According to Ohio's Department of Education's current report card system, how are schools identified as low-performing or failing? How does it compare to past versions?
10. What leadership practices do successful leaders in schools/districts identified as failing use to advance from the 'failing' designation?
11. Some people say that there is no such thing as a transformational leader in schools because the system is too rigidly dictated by laws and policy. What would you say to those people?
12. Schools are ranked and placed into categories in Ohio according to their academic performance and other factors. What category was your school or district ranked, and according to what data point(s)?

The interview questions were categorized into the following areas of exploration: legislation, leadership types, school improvement strategies, leadership characteristics, and reform types.

Data Analysis

The data analysis method employed for this qualitative analysis study was the Constant-Comparative Method. The constant comparative method is a process developed by Glaser and Strauss and used in grounded theory, where you sort and organize excerpts of raw data into

groups according to attributes and organize those groups in a structured way to formulate a new theory (Hallberg, 2006). The constant comparative method allowed the researcher to identify similarities and differences, which was then used to generate concepts or categories to support a possible new theory. Glaser and Strauss introduced this method in 1967 in their book, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*.

According to Glaser and Strauss, the constant comparative method was appropriate for qualitative research because it allowed researchers to develop grounded theories rather than imposing pre-existing theories onto the data. Another methodologist who discussed the usefulness of the constant comparative method in qualitative research is Charmaz (2006). Charmaz emphasized that the constant comparative method is beneficial for analyzing data inductively, allowing for a flexible and iterative approach to data analysis. According to Charmaz, the constant comparative method is an “iterative process that allows the researcher to move back and forth between data and analysis until a core category or categories emerge” (p. 46). Overall, the constant comparative method is a widely used technique in qualitative research because it allows researchers to generate theories and concepts grounded in the data itself and provides a flexible and iterative approach to data analysis.

When conducting qualitative research, data collection and analysis are simultaneous activities. The researcher may not know ahead of time every person who might be interviewed, all the questions that might be asked, or where to look next unless data are analyzed as they are being collected (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This research approach of data collection and analysis allowed the researcher to analyze the data as it was collected continuously. The constant comparative method approach also allows for refining data collection methods and research questions and identifying emerging themes and patterns in the data as they arise. Charmaz (2006)

believed that data collection and analysis are interwoven and iterative processes allowing the researcher to refine data collection strategies and research questions as the analysis proceeds. Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) went further to explore the importance of analyzing and interpreting the data as it was collected to refine data collection and analysis methods.

As the data were collected, they were placed in relationship to one of the initial research categories. I carefully analyzed each transcribed interview using open and axial coding to develop and later refine categories, themes, and significant findings based on topics emerging across all interviews and key findings from the reviewed research. During the open coding process, I established multiple codes, highlighting the characteristics the superintendents identified necessary to navigate reform efforts shared during the interviews. The analytic process was flexible enough to allow for the emergence of new categories from the data. As the data were analyzed, I remained open to unexpected findings and allowed them to shape any emerging categories and theories. Finally, the information was synthesized, and conclusions were drawn. This approach ensured that the analysis remained grounded in the data. According to Corbin and Strauss (2015), categories are not preconceived but allowed to emerge from the data in constant comparison, with an openness to theoretical sampling and the emergence of new categories. The flexibility of the analytic process supports the constant comparative method as it is designed to construct categories grounded in the data and which emerge from the data itself (Glaser & Strauss, 2017).

Validity/Limitations

Because the researcher is both the primary collector of information and interpreter of data in qualitative studies, it is believed that this method is closer to capturing the reality of the data than if an instrument had been interjected between participant and researcher (Merriam &

Tisdell, 2016). To address validity, the researcher shared data transcripts with participants to ensure accuracy (Rudestam & Newton, 2015). To understand a phenomenon, the primary purpose of conducting qualitative research is to replace the concepts of internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity used in quantitative research with credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability in qualitative studies (Lincoln et al., 1985). There are six fundamental strategies available to researchers to address internal validity in qualitative research, which comprise of triangulation, member checks, sufficient engagement in data collection, peer examination, researcher reflexivity, and participatory research methods.

Before the data collection process, a state school improvement official, not participating in the research study, reviewed all interview questions for clarity and understanding to ensure that the interview questions were reliable for all participants and to control for internal validity ensuring the clearest and most coherent version of the interview questions given.

According to Creswell (2007), utilizing an interview method presents some inherent challenges and limitations due to the researcher's dependence on the participant's ability to be transparent and honest while articulating and accurately recalling their experiences. Another constraint is the accuracy of the researcher's retelling of the participants' stories. Moreover, the researcher's background and personal life can potentially influence the lens through which the researcher views and interprets the participants' stories. Although the study will have a limited sample size, the chosen data collection method will enable the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences. Hence, the research's limitation can serve as an advantage in gaining in-depth insights into the participants' experiences.

Ethical Considerations

The research proposal has been designed with careful consideration of the participant's safety and confidentiality. To this end, the Institutional Review Board for Youngstown State University is responsible for reviewing studies involving human subjects and has approved the research. While the potential negative consequences of participating in the study are minimal, participants' responses may lead to risks such as adverse social and employment outcomes. However, the researcher took all necessary measures to protect participants' confidentiality and anonymity.

The researcher used directory information from the Ohio Department of Education report card spreadsheet to identify potential research subjects. In addition, the researcher cross-referenced the tenure of school superintendents with districts that have been in academic distress over time. Each potential candidate was invited to participate via email, and a consent form outlining the study's purpose, expected participation duration, procedures, potential benefits and risks, data confidentiality statement, right to withdraw without penalty, contact information for questions, and confirmation that participation is voluntary were attached. Upon confirmation from potential participants, each was sent a demographic questionnaire to complete. Finally, each participant selected a date and time for their interview from a list of potential dates shared between themselves and the researcher.

To ensure the confidentiality of interview data, digital and written records were stored securely for three years. The written documents were kept under lock and key in a personal location and then properly shredded and discarded per university policy after the retention period has ended. Digital files were stored in a password-protected Dropbox account only the researcher can access. Any personally recorded digital files, including interview data stored on digital

recorders, phones, or other electronic devices, were promptly destroyed after data analysis. These procedures align with the guidelines the American Psychological Association and Youngstown State University set forth.

Summary

The research aimed to identify the crucial leadership traits and experiences necessary for effectively navigating federal and state reform efforts. Specifically, the study sought to answer the question, "How do long-standing, transformational school district leaders in Ohio, who were appointed to their positions through legislation, describe successful reform efforts?" To analyze the data, the researcher planned to use a deductive approach based on the data analysis guidelines for qualitative studies as outlined by Merriman and Tisdell (2016). The analysis focused on predetermined themes based on the literature review of leadership styles and characteristics, with a particular emphasis on the leadership traits of all participants. Additionally, this method enabled new themes to emerge through inductive analysis based on a thorough reexamination of all research data in the form of cross-case analysis.

CHAPTER IV
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how long-standing, transformational school district leaders in Ohio, who were appointed to their positions through legislation, describe and implement mandated reform efforts. The study's research questions included:

1. How do long-standing, transformational school district leaders in Ohio, who were appointed to their positions through legislation, describe successful reform efforts?
2. How do long-standing, transformational school district leaders in Ohio, who were appointed to their positions through legislation, describe the implementation of successful reform efforts?

In this section, the researcher presents the results of the thematic analysis under Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2012) TA methodology, conducted on the interview transcripts of four experienced superintendents, denoted as Superintendents A, B, C, and D. The analysis aimed to identify and explore key themes and sub-themes that emerged from participants' collective insights and experiences. By following the rigorous principles of Thematic Analysis, the researcher identified a total of three major and several sub-themes. These themes and sub-themes shed light on various aspects of educational leadership, including motivations, challenges, strategies, barriers, and successful practices related to leading school improvement efforts in demanding contexts. The subsequent discussion delves into each identified theme and sub-theme providing a comprehensive examination of the superintendents' perspectives and their implications for educational leadership, policy formulation, and effective implementation.

Through this analysis, the researcher aimed to gain valuable insights into the intricate and multifaceted landscape of school reform and transformation, offering pertinent lessons for educational leaders, policymakers, and researchers.

For this study, four longstanding school superintendents in Ohio engaged in school reform shared their lived experiences in navigating their districts on the path toward school improvement under the legislative mandates associated with Ohio's school reform process. The perspectives in this chapter are those of each school superintendent from small to mid-sized school districts from various regions in Ohio. As the narrative of each school superintendent's experience unfolded, the subjective meaning of each participant's experiences emerged as related leadership motivations and challenges, the collaborative networks, and the dynamics of the educational system. Each story also revealed important experiences that helped to shape the leadership style and characteristics of the participant. The purpose of this chapter was to present the findings related to the main research question: How do long-standing, transformational school district leaders in Ohio, who were appointed to their positions through legislation, describe the implementation of successful reform efforts by exploring the specific qualities and skills crucial for navigating reform efforts as a superintendent. Findings have been organized by key constructs that emerged from the literature review and from new themes that emerged through inductive analysis using a constant comparative method. This organizing method served as a systematic way to disclose personal insights into each superintendent's experiences.

School reform refers to deliberate and comprehensive changes implemented in educational systems to improve student learning outcomes and overall educational quality. It aims to address various challenges faced by schools, such as disparities in student achievement, outdated teaching methods, and inadequate resources. To achieve these goals, school reform

initiatives often focus on the implementation of data-driven strategies to monitor and assess student progress. Additionally, reforms may also involve community engagement and collaboration with stakeholders, including parents, educators, and policymakers to ensure widespread support and sustainability (Education Commission of the States, 2021). I viewed the findings through the lens of the governmental reform strategy implemented in Ohio today. This legislative reform strategy in Ohio assumes that the state government, supported by the federal government, will set standards, develop tests, impose consequences, and offer support to the education system causing improvement. Through the lens of legislative school reform, I was able to examine the stories of each participant as they experienced reform implementation from the seat of the superintendency. Looking through different lenses provided various perspectives that helped to gain an in-depth understanding of their collective experiences navigating legislative school reform. By employing Lewin's Change Theory as a guiding framework during the analysis of findings, a deeper understanding of participants' experiences, responses to change, and the factors influencing successful or unsuccessful transitions were able to be made (Wojciechowski et al., 2016).

The potential for school leaders to develop traits and characteristics to allow them to navigate school reform, despite changing mandates and reforms, is promising, although reform measures appear to be localized in school districts that have a similar typology and demographic makeup. Leadership turnover and abandonment of reform initiatives are endemic in urban school systems with the average tenure of a superintendent being under five years (Hill et al., 2016) in reform settings. Notably, understanding board governance and collaborative networks has become a staple in maintaining longevity in the leadership position. A strong and positive board-superintendent relationship fosters stability and encourages the superintendent to stay committed

to the district's long-term success (Hess, 2018). The review of the literature has shown, however, that state mandates are dictated by federal legislation and require school leaders to be well-versed in multiple leadership styles in order to be effective.

Key elements of accountability, diversity and equity, community engagement, legislation and policy, and leadership were highlighted in the participant interviews. Inductively, two additional themes emerged from the data: a strong sense of passion and experience as a turnaround leader. The central question for the study sought to determine the characteristics and traits inhabited by successful school reform leaders. The sections below outline findings as they relate to supporting questions.

For this study, four school superintendents in Ohio shared their lived experiences in navigating legislative school reform efforts within their school districts. The perspectives in this chapter are those of transformational district superintendents from small to mid-sized school districts in various regions in Ohio. As the narrative of each school superintendent's experience unfolded, the subjective meaning of each participant's experiences emerged as related to accountability measures, diversity and equity, community engagement, legislation and policy, and leadership in leading a school district engaged in reform efforts. Each story also revealed important experiences that highlight the leadership style of the participant and allows for key leadership traits and characteristics to emerge as effective.

Recruitment Process

The superintendents in this study lead majority-minority school districts identified by the state of Ohio using the Ohio Schools Report Card as failing districts needing to implement mandated reforms. My research had a sample size of four district superintendents. The student enrollments of these districts ranged from 800 to 5,000, with a poverty rate of at least 60%. The

selected school districts are among the bottom 10% of academic performers in Ohio, comprising approximately 300 failing districts. The superintendents studied have been leading their districts for at least five years and have engaged with state leaders regarding school improvement measures and possible state takeover during their tenure.

A list of potential participants was identified from the Ohio Department of Education and cross-checked in the school report card database, ranking the lowest-achieving 10% of school districts within the state and on track for state takeover as identified by their reported academic data. The recruitment process also consisted of sending emails to superintendents of four school districts in Ohio to obtain letters of consent. The researcher attended the Ohio Alliance of Black School Educators (OABSE) to obtain letters of consent and to speak with superintendents who were interested in participating in the research study. The researcher used data from the Ohio School Report Cards to determine the demographics and enrollment of the district.

While the Ohio Department of Education's website lists each superintendent, the researcher used the districts' websites to cross-reference contact information for each superintendent. The four selected superintendents received an invitation letter via email approved by Youngstown State University Institutional Review Board and an informed consent form to participate in the study. The researcher communicated via email, phone, and in person to explain the research study's nature and answer any related questions. Once the individuals agreed to participate and signed the consent form, a link via Calendly was sent to allow for the individuals to schedule their interview. The researcher followed the procedure approved by the Institutional Review Board at Youngstown State University.

Participant Confidentiality

I made every attempt to protect the confidentiality of each participant during the course of the research study, adhering to all guidelines and protocols set forth by the Youngstown University Institutional Review Board throughout the study. My use of the online system Zoom allowed me to conduct semi-structured individual interviews with each superintendent. This format helped to safeguard the confidentiality of answers and the anonymity of those participating. Each participant read and signed the approved Youngstown State University Institutional Review Board informed consent form before the commencement of their interview.

All data reporting was generalized so as not to identify individual participants. Pseudonyms appear in final documents to protect the confidentiality of each participant, and no district was identified by name. In addition, if a participant used their name, any identifiers, or any other names during the interview process, the identifying information was changed or generalized in all transcriptions or narratives shared in the final reports. Although participants shared no information during the course of the interviews that could be potentially harmful to their future employment or social well-being in their school district, I took every precaution to protect both the confidentiality and anonymity of each participant.

Participant Profiles

Each of the four school superintendents from public school districts in the state of Ohio who participated in this study completed a demographic questionnaire and engaged in an interview session lasting no longer than 120 minutes. The demographic questionnaire provided personal and professional information (Appendix C). All four participants held a master's degree in educational administration. All four superintendents had educational backgrounds and served as building principals before climbing the central office ladder. Three of the four superintendents

were all district-level administrators before accepting the role of superintendent. The participants' marital status varied: Two participants were divorced, one of the divorced participants remarried, and two were married. All participants had children and only one had a school-age child. All participants would be considered middle-aged. Participants averaged 30 years' experience in K-12 education and had an average of 19 years as a school/district administrator. Each of the superintendents was in their first superintendency, and collectively, they averaged 11 years in the position. Three male and one female superintendents participated in the study. Table 1 provides a summary of participants' demographics and backgrounds.

Table 1

Demographics and Backgrounds Summary

Name	Age Range	Race	Years as a Superintendent	Current size of school district by enrollment	Typology of district	Gender	Highest Degree Obtained
Superintendent A	50-59	White	20	3,001- 4,500	Urban	Male	Doctorate
Superintendent B	40-49	Black	5	4,5001- 6,000	Urban	Male	Educational Specialist
Superintendent C	50-59	Black	10	Under 1,500	Urban	Female	Doctorate
Superintendent D	50-59	Black	9	1,501- 3,000	Urban	Male	Masters

The following section contains individual profiles of each participant. The information provided in the profiles was drawn from each participant's demographic questionnaire and the information shared in their interviews. An analysis of their interview was sent to each participant to verify the accuracy of the information reported.

Profile 1: Superintendent A

Superintendent A is a seasoned educational leader with 34 years of service in the field of K-12 education. Superintendent A commenced his academic journey as a proficient chemistry and math high school teacher, honing his pedagogical skills and developing a deep understanding of the intricacies of classroom dynamics. Demonstrating exceptional leadership qualities, Superintendent A transitioned to administrative roles, accumulating a wealth of experience over 31 years. He served as the Assistant High School Principal for four years before assuming the pivotal role of Principal for a commendable seven years. For the past two decades, Superintendent A has held the reins as the Superintendent in the same urban district, showcasing unwavering commitment and continuity. Throughout his tenure, he has navigated the complexities of overseeing a district comprising 3,001 to 4,500 students, contributing significantly to its growth and development. Aged between 50-59, Superintendent A embodies professional and personal stability and exerts himself as a dedicated family man. His leadership style is marked by strategic vision and a collaborative approach, fostering a positive environment for both educators and students. In recognition of his outstanding contributions, Superintendent A has garnered respect and admiration from colleagues, earning accolades for his transformative impact on education.

The study delves into the transformative leadership style of Superintendent A, analyzing the key strategies employed during his extensive tenure and their ripple effects on the district's educational outcomes. Furthermore, it aimed to uncover the nuanced challenges faced and overcome by Superintendent A in steering an urban school district, offering valuable insights for future educational leaders and policymakers. As a white male, Superintendent A's experiences

and perspectives add an essential layer to the dissertation's exploration of leadership dynamics within the diverse landscape of K-12 education.

Profile 2: Superintendent B

Superintendent B emerges with an impressive 23-year career dedicated to educational excellence. Superintendent B commenced his journey as a special education teacher, infusing his early career with a commitment to inclusive education. He holds an Educational Specialist degree. Over the subsequent 13 years, he ascended through the administrative echelons, assuming pivotal roles that underscore his dedication to fostering an inclusive and equitable educational environment. Superintendent B's leadership trajectory includes noteworthy positions such as Dean of Students, Special Education Director, Special Education Supervisor, and Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum.

Superintendent B's career is characterized by his resilient leadership in the dynamic landscape of urban education. Holding concurrent roles as Superintendent and Chief Executive Officer for the past nine years, he has significantly shaped the educational landscape of a district accommodating 4,501 to 6,000 students. What sets Superintendent B apart is his enduring commitment to a single district for an impressive five-year span, contributing to the district's stability and growth. The study seeks to unravel the intricate leadership style of Superintendent B, dissecting the strategies implemented during his extensive tenure and their far-reaching impact on educational outcomes within the urban context. Going beyond the professional sphere, the dissertation also delves into Superintendent B's personal narrative, navigating the intersection of leadership responsibilities with the complexities of familial life. As a divorced and remarried black male aged between 40-49, Superintendent B's experiences add a nuanced layer to the study, exploring the multifaceted dynamics of personal and professional life in the context of

educational leadership. The study also aspires to extract valuable insights from Superintendent B's journey, contributing to the broader discourse on diversity, equity, and inclusion in educational leadership.

Profile 3: Superintendent C

Superintendent C stands as a stalwart in the field of K-12 education, amassing an impressive 33-year career dedicated to educational excellence. Armed with a Ph.D., she initiated her professional journey as a middle school math teacher, laying the groundwork for her comprehensive understanding of the intricacies of classroom dynamics. Over two decades, Superintendent C ascended through the administrative ranks, showcasing a versatile skill set. Her leadership journey included roles such as Assistant Principal, Principal, Chief of Transformation, Deputy Chief of K-12, Superintendent, and currently an Executive Director of a non-profit philanthropic educational organization.

The pinnacle of Superintendent C's career has been marked by a decade-long tenure as the Superintendent of the same district, reflecting an unwavering commitment to continuity and sustained impact. Over this period, she has not only guided the educational trajectory of the district but has also actively contributed to its transformation. The district, with a size under 1,500, straddles the boundary between suburban and urban dynamics, presenting unique challenges and opportunities. The study endeavors to explore Superintendent C's distinctive leadership style, delving into the strategies she implemented during her extensive tenure and their profound impact on the educational landscape. Beyond her professional accomplishments, Superintendent C's personal narrative adds a compelling layer to the study. As a divorced black female aged between 50-59, balancing the demands of leadership with personal responsibilities, she navigates the complex intersection of professional and familial life. With one child,

Superintendent C's experiences offer valuable insights into the nuanced challenges faced by female leaders in education and contribute to the broader dialogue on leadership and transformation.

Profile 4: Superintendent D

Superintendent D emerges as a seasoned figure in the realm of K-12 education, boasting an impressive 27-year career dedicated to the pursuit of educational excellence. With a foundation as a middle school math teacher, Superintendent D has spent the past 17 years ascending through the administrative hierarchy, demonstrating a versatile skill set. Having held crucial roles such as Assistant Principal, Principal, Area Superintendent, and Superintendent, Superintendent D brings a wealth of experience and leadership acumen to the forefront.

A distinguishing aspect of Superintendent D's career is the steadfast commitment to a singular district for nine consecutive years as superintendent within the district and community that he grew up in and ultimately graduated from. This prolonged tenure underscores a dedication to continuity and sustained impact. The district, sized between 1,500 and 3,000, represents a unique blend of suburban and urban dynamics, presenting distinct challenges and opportunities for educational leadership.

Beyond the professional realm, Superintendent D's personal narrative enriches the study. Aged between 50-59 and married with children, he navigates the intricate balance between professional responsibilities and familial obligations. This intersection of personal and professional life offers valuable insights into the challenges faced by educational leaders in maintaining equilibrium. Superintendent D's profile contributes significantly to the ongoing discourse on sustained leadership impact, continuity, and the multifaceted dynamics of leadership within the context of suburban and urban educational environments.

Summary of Results

The following chart provides a reference of how school districts are identified as low performing in the State of Ohio which are then subject to legislative mandates. School districts identified as low performing often experience a high turnover in leadership, thus not enacting needed academic improvements.

Figure 1

Ohio Department of Education's Ranking System

ACHIEVEMENT COMPONENT RATING SCALE AND DESCRIPTIONS		
Percentage of Maximum Points Earned	Rating	Rating Description
Greater than or equal to 90% of maximum score	5 Stars	Significantly exceeds state standards in academic achievement
Greater than or equal to 80% but less than 90% of maximum score	4 Stars	Exceeds state standards in academic achievement
Greater than or equal to 70% but less than 80% of maximum score	3 Stars	Meets state standards in academic achievement
Greater than or equal to 50% but less than 70% of maximum score	2 Stars	Needs support to meet state standards in academic achievement
Less than 50% of maximum score	1 Star	Needs significant support to meet state standards in academic achievement

Understanding the Data

The primary data for this study were sourced from transcriptions of participant interviews, complemented by additional insights from the researcher's notes and reflective journal. To ensure the precision of participants' responses, meticulous field notes and electronic recordings were taken during each interview. The interviews were conducted through the online platform Zoom. Subsequently, the recorded interviews were transcribed using a private zoom setting as well as uploaded to iRecord for transcription and stored under the participant's pseudonym for confidentiality. Following the transcription phase, each participant's interview was analyzed thoroughly. The participants were then provided with an analysis of their respective interviews to verify the accuracy of the information gathered.

Given the substantial volume of data amassed in this study, I undertook an ongoing analysis of the transcripts as they were collected. This involved juxtaposing newly acquired data with existing interview data. Beyond the pertinent constructs revealed in the literature review, such as leadership styles, school reform efforts, and challenges, the current study allowed for the organic emergence of themes through an iterative process. This process involved revisiting transcripts and re-listening to audio recordings to discern potential themes. Employing a constant comparative method for data analysis, I rigorously analyzed the data after each interview, ensuring a thorough examination before proceeding to the next. This approach facilitated the comparison of data segments, revealing similarities and differences among participants' responses. Subsequently, the data were categorized based on commonalities and designated as thematic categories following Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) approach. The overarching goal of this method was to unveil discernible patterns within participants' responses.

Interviews

Participants received the interview questions up to seven days in advance to allow ample time for reflection on their experiences. This pre-interview preparation aimed to ensure they felt comfortable and ready to address reflective questions during the actual interview. Participants had the freedom to respond to the questions at their comfort level. Interestingly, all participants chose to elaborate on their answers, providing multiple examples that enhanced the clarity of their experiences as transformational school leaders. The interview durations varied between 40-90 minutes, and participants relished the opportunity to reflect on their journeys. Expressing gratitude, many participants thanked me after the interviews, noting that the process prompted them to ensure future leaders were being prepared to move into reform positions.

Coding and Category Creation

I diligently worked to transcribe and promptly analyze each interview immediately upon its completion, aiming to capture the precision and sentiments expressed during the discussions. Employing open and axial coding methods, I thoroughly examined each transcript to develop and subsequently refine categories, themes, and significant findings based on emerging topics across all interviews and relevant insights from the existing research literature. In the open coding phase, numerous codes were generated to highlight the key ideas shared by the superintendents during the interviews. While some codes were common among all the superintendents studied, others were specific to individual district leaders. These open codes were then organized into broader categories, encompassing themes like extensive motivations, challenges and barriers of leadership, collaborative networks and relationships, and leadership skills and dynamics of educational system. Throughout this preliminary coding process, referencing to the conceptual framework and literature reviewed in Chapter 2 proved beneficial, a strategy that was consistently repeated as themes and key findings were derived from the collected data.

Initially, I established broad categories, but as each interview unfolded, I adapted these categories based on data from multiple participants. Following the transcription of each interview, I revisited early interview transcriptions, refining the categorization process to accommodate new categories that emerged in later interviews. Additionally, I cross-referenced these findings with those in the reviewed literature to ascertain whether discernible qualities from the interviews aligned with the existing body of literature or introduced novel insights. This comparative approach allowed me to ensure the fidelity of categories to the actual content of the interviews and to gauge their consistency with existing research. Upon completing this iterative process, I derived key themes and significant findings that encapsulated the perceptions of the

four superintendents regarding their experiences transforming school districts engaged in school reform efforts and how their traits and characteristics factored into their success.

Member Checking

Incorporating a member-checking procedure allowed me to be engaged in a validation process by sharing an analysis of the interviews with each participant. This step aimed to verify the accuracy of the information collected and ensure alignment with the participants' original intentions. The member-checking process not only assisted in validating the precision of the report but also helped identify any potential omissions in the analysis of each interview. In cases where clarification was needed, follow-up emails were sent to participants. Throughout this process, each participant's confidentiality was preserved through pseudonyms, ensuring that all data linked to individual participants remained generalized in all reports.

Sample Identification and Selection (Sampling) and Data Collection

Research is an organized set of procedures that primarily deals with all facets of problems with complex natures. In the present world, research is conducted in all academic subjects. Planning is ingrained into research to support the relevant subject as information may be effectively used in a variety of political, economic, social, spiritual, and/or physical contexts (Bryman, 2016). In almost all professions, researchers conduct studies with the goal of putting theory and vision into practice. The critical and professional thinking in various professional domains is to develop and create theories for healthy and productive practices, guarantee positive change and development in the undernourished parts of society, and formulate guidelines to ensure activities run smoothly and are sustained through professional interventions and provision of services (Bernard, 2013; Kumar, 2018).

In addition, the narrative methodology entails the management of tools to systematically develop inferences and techniques to deliver rich descriptions of study participants' lived experiences (Neuman, 2007). According to Yin (2011), the methodological processes mainly address research ethics, study designs, literature reviews, and the use of methodologies to conduct investigations. By adopting the qualitative research design, this study focused on the selection of a sample which had to be more appropriate and accurate to address and answer the research questions qualitatively and serve the purpose of the study. It is a matter of fact that the nature of the study primarily depends on the purpose of the study (Akcam et al., 2019), where this study aimed to address the experiences of long-standing, appointed superintendents who transformed failing school districts. The major purpose was to delve into the issue and understand it from the perspectives of participants to address the grassroots issues for which the qualitative research design was most accurate and suitable (Leeming, 2018).

A total of four superintendents in minority school districts were identified to understand how long-standing, transformational school leaders in Ohio, who were appointed to their positions through legislation, describe and implement mandated reform efforts, which were labeled as "failing districts" or on the road toward state takeover. The central questions of the study are:

1. How do long-standing, transformational school district leaders in Ohio, who were appointed to their positions through legislation, describe successful reform efforts?
2. How do long standing, transformational school district leaders in Ohio, who were appointed to their positions through legislation, describe the implementation of successful reform efforts?

Sub-questions include:

- 3 Which leadership practices were identified as successful within school reform environment?
- 4 What are the primary leadership qualities that emerge for transformational leaders?
- 5 What outside factors do transformational leaders identify as having shaped their approaches to school reform in public urban school districts?
- 6 How are policy mandates, such as new graduation requirements, more rigorous standards, and demands for school accountability, shape leadership decisions?

These districts were identified by the ranking list made public by the Ohio Department of Education. The identified respondents (study sample) were purposively and conveniently selected based on the notion that they met the study's inclusion criteria (purposive sampling technique) and were available and willing to participate in the study (sampling by convenience/convenience sampling techniques) (Etikan et al., 2016).

After the sample (study participants) was identified and selected, data were collected through qualitative interview methods in two ways, online and in-person. Two participants were interviewed through Zoom (because of their unavailability for in-person/face-to-face interviews) and two were interviewed in a face-to-face interaction. Before conducting the interviews, a proper rapport was built with the participants ensuring them the privacy and confidentiality of their data and its utility for academic purposes only, which are among the fundamentals of any research study/strategy (Kamanzi & Romania, 2019). The entire conversation during the interviews was recorded with the purpose of transcription and to ensure that any relevant information does not go unaddressed.

The collected data were properly edited to remove the irrelevant information and then transcribed and prepared for analysis. In this context, Thematic Analysis was the most advantageous and relevant method for analysis among many others, which had the potential to serve the basic purpose of this study (Terry et al., 2017; Joffe, 2011). The researcher adopted Braun and Clarke’s (2006; 2012) six-step thematic analysis model out of several Thematic Methodological Procedures. The transcribed data were crossed through six stages, starting from familiarization with the data (presented in Table 1), followed by the initial coding/descriptive coding. The codes were then merged into a single file to understand categories and clusters through the proper organization of the data (presented in Table 1 for practical understanding). The codes were carefully clustered into sub-categories (predominantly known as sub-themes) while the sub-clusters/themes were then clubbed/merged into major categories named Major Themes. Following the last step of Braun and Clarke’s methodology, the major themes were then analyzed to lead the study towards basic results and key findings which are supported with the actual illustrative quotes from the transcripts to ensure and present the direct expressions of the study’s participants with the readers. After the identification of the key findings, a discussion section was devised, which is supported by the researcher’s understanding of the relevant literary information. Table 2 shows example codes, clusters, and themes. Next, the researcher presents the study’s findings.

Table 2

Thematic Chart / Chronological and Systematic Operation of Codes, Clusters, and Themes

Illustrative Quotes (taken/selected from transcripts through reading (Familiarization with the data)	Generated Codes (Coding, Descriptive Coding/initial Coding)	Clubbing the Codes into Clusters / Sub- themes based on similarity (addressing the same context/concept – through categorization	Generated Major Themes (the clusters are clubbed into Major Themes based on similarity while addressing the same concept/context/
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		and Organization of codes	referring to the same research question/ objective of the study
<p><i>"My dad was a school superintendent in Steubenville, Ohio. My mom was a college teacher, an education professor."</i></p> <p><i>"Most of my experience was as a turnaround administrator. My background is in special Ed, so I've always had the patience to work with those who other people didn't..."</i></p> <p><i>"Strategies that I had um, implemented had worked, whether it was as a principal or as a Cabinet member of a large school district"</i></p> <p><i>"I knew that I saw what's happening to kids like where I grew up. And I wanted to make a difference."</i></p> <p><i>"I think it's rare that you get that opportunity where politics fall in line. The thirst to get better is in place, and the spirit of the team is present. I think it's rare for that. But I do believe it's possible."</i></p>	<p>Family and personal background Family influence</p> <p>Experience and Background as a Turnaround Administrator</p> <p>Demonstrated success in previous roles</p> <p>Passion for education and equity</p> <p>Rare Opportunity and Factors</p>	<p>Sub-Theme 1: Motivations for Taking on Superintendent Role</p>	<p>Major Theme 1: Motivations, Challenges, and Leadership</p>

Findings

This section further explains the predetermined themes and the ensuing sub-themes that served as the groundwork for analyzing participants' narratives. Additionally, it outlines themes that surfaced organically through inductive analysis in the course of the study. The first theme underscores the role of barriers and motivations in propelling individuals toward the superintendency, enhancing their ability to comprehend and address challenges. The second theme underscores participants' recognition of the importance of building collaborative networks and fostering relationships beyond the district. Lastly, the third theme underscores the necessity

for superintendents to possess diverse leadership skills to effectively navigate the complexities of the ever-evolving educational landscape. The study included participation from three male superintendents and one female superintendent. Due to the limited gender representation, the data were insufficient to support a conclusive finding on the effects of gender. The study included participation from three male superintendents and one female superintendent. Due to the limited gender representation, the data were insufficient to support a conclusive finding on the effects of gender.

In analyzing the responses from the study participants, several additional themes emerged, further enriching our understanding of the intricacies involved in educational leadership. Among these, continuous improvement stood out as a foundational principle, emphasizing the necessity for relentless enhancement across all facets of an organization or school district. This theme underscores the idea that improvement should not be confined solely to academic achievements but should permeate every level of the institution, aiming for a holistic upliftment. Change, another significant theme, was highlighted as an inherently dynamic and fluid process, an essential consideration for leaders navigating the complex landscape of educational reform. It suggests that adaptability and responsiveness are critical in managing the ebb and flow of organizational needs and challenges. Lastly, the role of being a politician was identified as equally crucial as that of being an academic leader in spearheading school reform. This theme suggests that the skills associated with political acumen, such as negotiation, advocacy, and building consensus are indispensable in achieving meaningful change within educational settings. Together, these themes paint a comprehensive picture of the multifaceted leadership required to drive successful reform in today's educational environments. Table 3 shows a summary of the three themes.

Table 3*Summary of Major Themes*

Theme 1: Motivation, Challenges, and Barriers of Leadership

Theme 2: Collaborative Networks & Relationships

Theme 3: Leadership Skills and Dynamics of Education System

Table 4*Summary of Secondary Emerging Themes*

Theme 1: Continuous Improvement

Theme 2: Change

Theme 3: Role of a Politician

Major Theme 1: Motivations, Challenges, and Barriers of Leadership

RQ 1 How do long-standing, transformational school district leaders in Ohio, who were appointed to their positions through legislation, describe successful reform efforts?

In the realm of educational leadership, the journey of superintendents tasked with driving school improvement efforts is often characterized by a dynamic interplay of motivations, challenges, and leadership strategies. The narratives of Superintendents A, B, C, and D illuminated the complex landscapes that these leaders navigated, shedding light on the diverse factors that drove them to undertake the demanding roles of revitalizing underperforming school districts. The exploration of their motivations uncovered a range of personal, professional, and community-driven incentives that fueled their commitment to transforming educational outcomes. Equally crucial were the challenges that loomed large in their paths, revealing the intricate obstacles that they overcame to effect meaningful changes. These challenges included

navigating political dynamics, tackling rigid accountability systems, and fostering collaboration with diverse stakeholders. Amidst these motivations and challenges emerged a deep reflection on effective leadership practices, characterized by consistency, resilience, and the ability to inspire others. This major theme (see Table 3) delved into the motivations that prompted superintendents to undertake such challenging roles, the challenges they encountered, and the leadership attributes they deployed to drive school improvements and reforms. By exploring these superintendents' motivations, challenges, and leadership strategies, the researcher gained insights into the complex tapestry of transformational educational leadership of underperforming school districts.

Sub-Theme 1.1. Motivations for Taking on Superintendent Role

This theme summarizes the diverse motivations that led individuals to assume the challenging role of superintendents, particularly within underperforming school districts (see Table 2). This sub-theme encompasses various ideations from the empirical data that shed light on the intricate interplay of personal, experiential, and professional factors that drove individuals toward these demanding leadership positions. Family and personal backgrounds had profound impacts on each individual's career trajectory. The influence of family, along with personal backgrounds, shaped their values, beliefs, and aspirations. These foundational elements served as driving forces pushing individuals to seek roles that aligned with their upbringings and personal convictions. This was evident in the codes referencing family influence and the shaping of participants' career choices.

“My dad was a school superintendent in Steubenville, Ohio. My mom was a college teacher, an education professor.” -Superintendent A

“What mainly for me is my own personal story. I was a struggling reader growing up, and I know what it feels like to be a struggling student.” Superintendent B

“We weren't even a full person, so we have to keep that in mind as we move forward, but my motivation is to make sure that our students, our scholars, I call them scholars have advocates.” Superintendent D

Experiences and backgrounds as turnaround administrators emerged as significant motivational factors.

“I think the reason for me was mostly my experience. Most of my experience was as a turnaround administrator.” Superintendent C”

Superintendents who had previously worked in turnaround situations displayed a passion for education and equity. Their prior engagements in challenging environments underscored their commitments to addressing educational disparities and ensuring every student's success. The desire to make a meaningful difference, driven by a personal connection to educational equity, motivated superintendents to take on the leadership roles in failing school districts.

"I knew that I saw what was happening to kids like where I grew up. And I wanted to make a difference." Superintendent B

Demonstrated success in previous roles contributed to the motivations to become transformational superintendents. Superintendents who achieved positive outcomes in their previous positions were drawn to the superintendency as a means to continue their impactful work. These motivations stemmed from a desire to extend their influences and contribute to the betterment of struggling school districts. It reflects a deep-rooted dedication to the field of education and a commitment to enacting positive changes.

"Strategies that I had implemented had worked, . . . whether it was as a principal or as a Cabinet member of a large school district." Superintendent D

Opportunity-driven motivations highlighted the allure of the superintendent's role as an avenue for creating a transformative impact. Superintendents perceived the positions as platforms through which they could drive significant changes in educational systems. This overarching motivation often intertwined with the passion for education and equity, as well as the pursuit of positive outcomes, culminating in comprehensive drives to improve educational experiences for all students.

"I think it's rare that you get that opportunity where politics fall in line. The thirst to get better is in place, and the spirit of the team is present. I think it's rare for that. But I do believe it's possible." Superintendent C

In essence, the motivation to assume the roles of superintendents in underperforming school districts was a multifaceted amalgamation of personal values, prior experiences, demonstrated successes, and a commitment to educational equity. The interplay of these factors shaped the narratives of each participant's journey, fostering deep senses of purpose and determination to navigate the challenges inherent in turnaround situations.

Sub-Theme 1.2. Challenges and Barriers to Transforming School Districts

The theme palpably highlights the landscape that superintendents navigate when striving to drive positive change in underperforming school districts. This sub-theme encompasses a range of codes that underscore the complexities and obstacles inherent in the school improvement process. Understanding and implementing the improvement process emerges as a foundational challenge for superintendents. The codes pertaining to this challenge shed light on the intricate nature of translating theoretical frameworks into practical strategies. The dynamic

and multifaceted nature of school improvement necessitates a comprehensive understanding of its nuances, requiring superintendents to adeptly tailor approaches to their unique contexts.

"I don't think the improvement process has been a barrier. It is basically a format."

Superintendent A

"So it's not a barrier that the effectiveness of the plan is your ability to follow through on the data to understand and know what kids need to know." Superintendent C

"That's how the process should work. It should work effectively." Superintendent D

Challenges in adapting state frameworks reflect the tensions that arise when attempting to align local initiatives with state-mandated frameworks. The codes in this category point to the difficulties of striking a balance between adhering to standardized models while catering to the specific needs of individual districts. This challenge underscores the nuanced role of superintendents as they navigate the interplay between state policies and district realities.

"The challenge is not to let those nuances overtake the overall structure in the coherence of the structure."

"It's a barrier because their model doesn't allow for those things, but it can be altered or edited to fit your need."

Awareness of diversity and poverty underscores a critical challenge that superintendents encounter in school improvement efforts. The codes highlighting this challenge shed light on the need to address the diverse needs of students coming from varying backgrounds. Superintendents must grapple with crafting inclusive strategies that cater to the socio-economic, cultural, and academic disparities present within their districts.

"I saw a lot of things about the way people were discriminated against . . . both by race and poverty." Superintendent C

Necessity due to challenges underscores the motivation superintendents derive from the pressing challenges they encounter. The codes in this category emphasize the imperative for change in the face of stagnation or decline. These challenges serve as catalysts for superintendents to enact proactive measures aimed at transforming their districts, infusing a sense of urgency into their leadership approaches.

". . . out of the necessity to reform." . . . "out of my track record, but also a need as well."

Superintendent C

Impact of state laws and the customization of state models depict the duality of navigating regulatory frameworks. The codes within these categories reflect the complexities of adhering to state policies while also advocating for localized strategies. Superintendents must balance adherence to standardized requirements with the autonomy to adapt approaches that best suit their districts' unique needs.

"We were always affected by the vouchers, by school vouchers. I don't know. Forgot what bill that was that was passed, I believe, in 2000." Superintendent D

"I think we, as educators, often think that those or that model can never be customized to meet our specific needs." Superintendent C

In essence, the sub-theme paints a vivid picture of the multifaceted landscape superintendents must navigate as they endeavor to lead turnaround efforts in underperforming school districts. From adapting state frameworks to addressing diversity and poverty, superintendents grapple with a myriad of challenges that demand a delicate balance between policy adherence and customized solutions. This sub-theme underscores the resilience and adaptive capacity of superintendents in their pursuit of sustainable improvement.

Sub-Theme 1.3. Overcoming Challenges and Stereotypes

The complex interplay between superintendents' efforts to drive school improvement and the prevailing challenges and stereotypes that shape these endeavors were asked to determine and understand the context. In this context, addressing misconceptions and stereotypes emerges as a fundamental aspect of the leadership strategies employed by superintendents (Sunguya et al., 2014). Superintendents recognize the need to challenge assumptions about the capacity of underperforming districts and are strategic in their communication to foster a more accurate understanding of the challenges they face.

" . . . speaks to people's stereotype around a narrative that they've created or the states created." Superintendent C

"What, a district with a lot of minority students had to be failing? And when I said, we have the same rating as where she lived. Her eyes popped." Superintendent C

On the contrary, top-down versus grassroots solutions reflect the spectrum of approaches that superintendents consider in addressing challenges and stereotypes. The codes within this category depict the nuanced decision-making process that superintendents engage in when choosing between implementing top-down policies or grassroots initiatives. Superintendents grapple with finding the right balance between centralized directives and collaborative, community-driven approaches to ensure sustainable change.

"Solutions usually have to come from the grassroots up." Superintendent A

Superintendents' endeavors to overcome challenges and stereotypes are characterized by a combination of proactive communication, strategic decision making, and a commitment to fostering a culture of understanding. The codes within this sub-theme collectively underscore the

multifaceted nature of superintendents' efforts to shift perceptions, challenge biases, and drive meaningful change in underperforming school districts.

Resultantly, the critical role of superintendents as change agents who navigate and challenge the prevailing misconceptions and stereotypes that impede school improvement efforts is evidently underscored. Superintendents strive to dismantle barriers and foster an environment conducive to transformative change through targeted communication, strategic decision making, and a dedication to community-driven approaches. This sub-theme underscores the transformative power of leadership in transcending challenges and reshaping perceptions for the betterment of underperforming school districts.

Sub-Theme 1.4. Accountability and Data-Driven Decision Making

The sub-theme probes into the convoluted relationship between accountability measures and the leadership strategies employed by superintendents to facilitate school improvement. Predominantly, balancing accountability and leadership underscores the delicate equilibrium that superintendents must maintain between complying with accountability mandates and exercising effective leadership. The codes within this category illuminate the challenges that arise when accountability measures, intended to monitor progress inadvertently limit the autonomy necessary for innovative leadership approaches. Superintendents grapple with the need to balance adherence to accountability requirements while still exercising visionary leadership to drive meaningful change.

"I think you start more with what do you want for your kids?" Superintendent A

Utilization of improvement process reflects the strategic incorporation of structured improvement processes by superintendents. The codes within this category underline the importance of adopting systematic approaches that guide school improvement efforts.

Superintendents navigate through complex frameworks and models, using these processes to channel their leadership efforts effectively. The process serves as a roadmap, enabling data-driven decisions and fostering a culture of continuous improvement.

"So I think the Ohio Improvement Process provides structure to really analyze, to get you a database to analyze and make decisions." Superintendent D

" But most of the time, people don't use it in that way. They use it as more of a matter. It's not used as a tool to really help. It's just, it's just something that you have to do." Superintendent D

The use of data and strategies for school improvement emphasizes the critical role of data in informing decision making and shaping strategies for improvement. The codes within this category highlight superintendents' reliance on data to identify areas of concern, monitor progress, and refine interventions. Data serve as a powerful tool for accountability, allowing superintendents to transparently showcase achievements while also pinpointing areas that require further attention.

"We had to have a star. I think this year we will probably have one." Superintendent B

"Our biggest gain was actually in gap closing." Superintendent B

Sub-Theme 1.5. Superintendent Turnover and Decision Factors

The Superintendents' Turnover and Decision Factors entail a multifaceted landscape of superintendent turnover, elucidating the challenges faced by new superintendents and the complex decision factors that influence their tenure (Grissom & Andersen, 2012). In this context, challenges faced by new superintendents encapsulates the difficulties encountered by individuals assuming the superintendent role in a district. The codes within this category underscore the formidable learning curve that new superintendents must navigate as they grapple with the

intricacies of district leadership. From understanding district dynamics to forging relationships with stakeholders, new superintendents are confronted with multifarious challenges that necessitate a blend of adaptability, resilience, and strategic acumen.

"So I worry about the superintendents coming on now, because they're coming on, obviously, with a mission to do that, to make a difference." Superintendent C

The importance of support and understanding political culture emphasizes the pivotal role that organizational support and a nuanced grasp of the political landscape play in superintendent turnover. The codes within this category underscore the significance of comprehensive support systems that facilitate the smooth transition of new superintendents. Furthermore, the codes illuminate the indispensability of understanding the political undercurrents and cultural nuances within the district's administrative framework. A superintendent's ability to comprehend and navigate these intricacies significantly influences their effectiveness in steering school improvement efforts.

"All I needed was the support of the board and the mayor. And I felt we could really make a difference." Superintendent D

"I think as a new superintendent, you need to understand the political culture of the community." Superintendent D

Change in the superintendent's role and focus delves into the evolution of the superintendent's responsibilities over time. The codes within this category shed light on the shifting landscape of district leadership, where the role of the superintendent has expanded to encompass a broader range of responsibilities. This evolution from traditional administrative functions to a more transformative and strategic role underscores educational leadership's dynamic nature in response to evolving challenges and expectations.

"We've had to transition whether we liked it or not, and many of us don't like it."

Superintendent C

"And that's where I believe the high turnover comes from because pre COVID it was strictly about academic achievement." Superintendent C

Sub-Theme 1.6. Success Strategies for Failing Districts

Similarly, the Success Strategies for Failing Districts attempts to address the strategies and approaches employed by superintendents to drive positive transformation and uplift districts facing significant challenges (Kowal et al., 2009). In this regard, continuous turnaround focus underscores the unwavering commitment of successful superintendents to sustain a continuous improvement trajectory. The codes within this category highlight the importance of maintaining a laser focus on the school improvement process, even amidst obstacles. This persistent dedication serves as a catalyst for effecting positive change, instilling a culture of continuous growth and development within the district.

"But I've seen it more often than not, that when you become a turnaround leader, you better make your pathway with turning around, and just keep going from turn around and turn around." Superintendent C

Data-driven decision making emerges as a linchpin in the arsenal of success strategies. The codes within this category illuminate the pivotal role of data in informing strategic decisions. Successful superintendents leverage data to diagnose issues, identify trends, and refine interventions. This evidence-based approach empowers leaders to make informed choices that align with the unique needs of their districts, ensuring that resources are strategically allocated for maximum impact.

“We've hired a data person in the district... put the right supports in place.”

Superintendent A

Addressing learning standards speaks to the emphasis on aligning strategies with educational goals. The codes within this category underscore the significance of aligning district initiatives with state standards and academic expectations. This alignment serves as a foundation for setting clear targets, tracking progress, and ensuring that efforts are geared toward enhancing student achievement.

"Kids fail the standard. What do we do? They just keep going, or they blame the kids. So now you never really address what the issue is." Superintendent D

"So in first grade, the element could be characterization, or whatever it might be, but you never teach it." Superintendent D

Fairness and consistency reflect the emphasis on equitable practices in driving district improvement. The codes within this category highlight the importance of maintaining fairness and consistency in policies, procedures, and interventions. This commitment to equity fosters trust within the school community and ensures that all students have equal access to quality education.

"Being fair, firm, and consistent. It's crucial. We have to treat people fair. You have to refer to your standards and beliefs. You have to be consistent." Superintendent D

Focus on student learning and success places the students' educational journey at the forefront. The codes within this category underscore the significance of student outcomes as the ultimate measure of success. Successful superintendents prioritize student learning and achievement, striving to create an environment that supports academic growth and positive educational experiences.

"We have one job to do. And that's to make sure kids learn." Superintendent B

"My focus is to make sure that our students... are educated like they have a right to."

Superintendent B

Changing the narrative and communication encapsulates the proactive efforts of superintendents to reshape perceptions and enhance stakeholder engagement. The codes within this category highlight the importance of effective communication in dispelling misconceptions and fostering collaboration. By articulating a compelling vision and engaging stakeholders in transparent dialogue, successful superintendents are able to garner support and mobilize collective efforts toward district improvement.

"Leaders need to write their own narrative, train their constituents about that narrative."

Superintendent C

"Whatever the state puts out, that's what the state puts out. But we have our own narrative. Communicating that to the community, to the constituents, so that they have a new narrative?" Superintendent C

Sub-Theme 1.7. Personal Impact and Student Focus

The subject theme sheds light on the profound impact of superintendents' personal dedication and student-centered leadership on the success of their districts. The data found that commitment to students' success resonates as a fundamental driving force behind the leadership of successful superintendents. The codes within this category highlight the deep-rooted commitment of these leaders to ensure that every decision and initiative is driven by the best interests of the students. This unwavering dedication serves as a rallying point for the entire school community, fostering a shared commitment to enhancing student outcomes.

"It's gotta be a person, a transformational leader that has the political and human capital to influence decisions that impact and affect their district." Superintendent C

Student-focused leadership underscores the pivotal role of students in shaping every aspect of district improvement efforts. The codes within this category illuminate the emphasis on creating a student-centered environment that prioritizes their needs, aspirations, and achievements. Successful superintendents understand that a student-focused approach permeates throughout the district, influencing policies, programs, and practices to align with the holistic development of students.

"We always do it with the progress measure, because that's what we do. We grow students' value-added measure, which is also not progress, the gap closing. We do well with that." Superintendent D

Incorporating these principles into their leadership approach, successful superintendents catalyze positive change that extends beyond metrics and statistics. Their commitment to student's success and student-focused leadership redefines the purpose of education and ensures that all decisions are guided by the ultimate goal of fostering the growth and well-being of each student.

Table 5-

Theme 1

Major Theme	Sub-Theme	Codes	Illustrative Quotes
Major Theme 1: Motivation Challenges, and Barriers of Leadership		Family and personal background Family influence	<i>"My dad was a school superintendent in Steubenville, Ohio. My mom was a college teacher, an education professor."</i>
	Sub-Theme 1: Motivations for Taking on Superintendent Role	Experience and Background as a Turnaround Administrator Demonstrated success in previous roles	<i>"Most of my experience was as a turnaround administrator. My background is in special Ed, so I've always had the patience to work with those who other people didn't..."</i>

		<p>Passion for education and equity</p> <p>Rare Opportunity and Factors</p>	<p><i>"Strategies that I had um, implemented had worked, whether it was as a principal or as a Cabinet member of a large school district"</i></p> <p><i>"I knew that I saw what's happening to kids like where I grew up. And I wanted to make a difference."</i></p> <p><i>"I think it's rare that you get that opportunity where politics fall in line. The thirst to get better is in place, and the spirit of the team is present. I think it's rare for that. But I do believe it's possible."</i></p>
	<p>Sub-Theme 2: Challenges and Barriers to transforming school districts</p>	<p>Understanding improvement process</p> <p>Challenges in adapting state frameworks</p> <p>Awareness of diversity and poverty</p> <p>Impact of state laws</p> <p>Customization of state models</p>	<p><i>"I don't think the improvement process has been a barrier. It is basically a format."</i></p> <p><i>"The challenge is not to let those nuances overtake the overall structure in the coherence of the structure. It's a barrier because their model doesn't allow for those things, but it can, it can be, um, altered or edited to fit your knee."</i></p> <p><i>"I saw a lot of things about the way people were discriminated against... both by race and poverty."</i></p> <p><i>"We were always affected by the vouchers, by school vouchers. I don't know. Forgot what bill that was that was passed, I believe, in 2000."</i></p> <p><i>"I think we, as educators often think that those or that model can never be customized to meet our specific needs."</i></p>
	<p>Sub-Theme 3: Overcoming Challenges and Stereotypes</p>	<p>Addressing misconceptions and stereotypes</p> <p>Top-down vs. grassroots solutions</p>	<p><i>"they're gonna label district is failing based on a demographic."</i></p> <p><i>"speaks to people's stereotype around a narrative that they've created or the states created."</i></p> <p><i>"Solutions usually have to come from the grassroots up."</i></p>
	<p>Sub-Theme 4: Accountability and Data-Driven Decision-Making</p>	<p>Balancing accountability and leadership</p> <p>Utilization of improvement process</p> <p>Use of data and strategies for school improvement</p>	<p><i>"I think you start more with what do you want for your kids."</i></p> <p><i>"I think the Ohio Improvement Process provides, structure to really analyze, to get you a database to analyze and make decisions."</i></p> <p><i>"We had to have a star. I think this year we will probably have one."</i></p>

			<i>"Our biggest gain was actually in gap closing."</i>
	Sub-Theme 5: Superintendent Turnover and Decision Factors	<p>Challenges faced by new superintendents</p> <p>Importance of support and understanding political culture</p> <p>Change in superintendent's role and focus</p>	<p><i>"I worry about the superintendents coming on now, because they're coming on, obviously, with a mission to do that, to make a difference."</i></p> <p><i>"All I needed was the support of the board and the mayor. And I felt we could really make a difference."</i></p> <p><i>"We've had to transition whether we liked it or not, and many of us don't like it."</i></p>
	Sub-Theme 6: Success Strategies for Failing Districts	<p>Continuous turnaround focus</p> <p>Data-driven decision-making</p> <p>Addressing learning standards</p> <p>Fairness and consistency</p> <p>Focus on student learning and success</p> <p>Changing the narrative and communication</p>	<p><i>"But I've seen it more often than not, that when you become a turnaround, you better make your pathway with turning around, and just keep going from turn around and turn around."</i></p> <p><i>"We've hired a data person in the district... put the right supports in place."</i></p> <p><i>"So in first grade, the element could be characterization, or whatever it might be, but you never teach it."</i></p> <p><i>"Being fair, firm, and consistent. It's crucial. We have to treat people fairly. You have to refer to your standards and beliefs. You have to be consistent."</i></p> <p><i>"My focus is to make sure that our students... are educated like they have a right to."</i></p> <p><i>"whatever the state puts out, that's what the state puts out. But we have our own narrative."</i></p>
	Sub-Theme 7: Personal Impact and Student Focus	<p>Commitment to students' success</p> <p>Student-focused leadership</p>	<p><i>"We have one job to do. And that's to make sure kids learn."</i></p> <p><i>"You have to be centered for a while, you know, focusing to be focused on students."</i></p>

Major Theme 2: Collaborative Networks and Relationships

RQ 2. How do long-standing, transformational school district leaders in Ohio, who were appointed to their positions through legislation, describe the implementation of successful reform efforts?

In the pursuit of school improvement and transformation, education leaders often find themselves navigating a complex web of relationships and networks. Major Theme 2, "Collaborative Networks and Relationships," investigates the crucial role that collaborative networks and effective relationships play in driving positive change within school districts. This theme encapsulates the dynamics between superintendents, school boards, communities, and external partners, highlighting how these connections contribute to the success of school improvement initiatives. By exploring the experiences, strategies, and challenges related to collaborative networks and relationships, this theme illuminates the multifaceted nature of educational leadership and the power of collective efforts in achieving sustainable improvements in educational outcomes. This was evident in the codes referencing collaborative networks and community relations.

Sub-Theme 2.1. Importance of Collaborative Networks

Collaborative networks have long standings in school improvement and transformation (Tahmooresnejad & Beaudry, 2018). The subject Sub-Theme entails empirical details about such importance in terms of transformation. In this context, the insights from the interviews reveal that successful superintendents recognize and leverage the significance of building and nurturing networks that extend beyond their immediate district boundaries. These networks serve as a platform for sharing ideas, best practices, and experiences, fostering a culture of continuous learning and improvement.

"I'll start with the academic networks. Of course, your conferences and organizations which are for superintendents are a must, because that's where your colleagues and counterparts gather and thought partner. " Superintendent C

The interviews underscore the value of networking and collaboration as vehicles for success. Superintendents highlight that engaging in collaborative networks gives them a broader perspective, enabling them to tap into a wealth of knowledge, resources, and expertise. Through interactions with peers, both within their districts and from other regions, superintendents gain insights into effective strategies, innovative solutions, and novel approaches to school improvement. This exchange of ideas empowers leaders to adapt and tailor successful practices to their unique contexts, ultimately leading to more impactful outcomes.

“Actively involved, knowledgeable, intelligent, and I say that as a juxtaposition to charismatic charisma will carry you so far. But if you don't have the knowledge and you don't know what you're talking about, the charisma will wane.” Superintendent D

Furthermore, the sub-theme emphasizes a specific focus on diversity and underserved populations within collaborative networks. Superintendents acknowledge the importance of engaging with diverse stakeholders, including those representing underserved and marginalized communities. Collaborative networks create opportunities for cross-cultural dialogue, which deepens understanding and informs inclusive approaches to school improvement. The engagement of diverse perspectives ensures that strategies are equitable, responsive, and designed to address the unique needs of all students, irrespective of their backgrounds.

"To me, they are the most important because that's where you get the real thought partnering and suggestions and lessons learned." Superintendent C

"The big national superintendent organizations have more districts that are not in need of reform." Superintendent D

In essence, the theme reveals that collaborative networks are not just about sharing practices; they are mechanisms for catalyzing change through collective learning, empowerment, and inclusivity. The recognition of the importance of diverse voices within these networks aligns with the overarching aim of creating meaningful and sustainable improvements in educational outcomes for all students.

Sub-Theme 2.2. School Board and Community Relations

School Board and Community Relations are critical aspects of fostering strong relationships between superintendents, school boards, and the broader community (Fusarelli, 2006). The interview/empirical data highlight the multifaceted nature of these relationships, emphasizing the pivotal role they play in driving school improvement and transformation efforts. One key observation is the significance of advocacy and legislative understanding. Superintendents recognize that successful engagement with school boards and the community requires a deep understanding of educational policies, regulations, and legislative dynamics. This knowledge equips leaders to communicate effectively, navigate challenges, and advocate for the best interests of their students and schools. Clear and informed communication about legislative impacts fosters a sense of transparency and collaboration, reinforcing the idea that educational leadership is a shared responsibility.

"I knew that that was going to be a major part of... understanding what was going on, why, and the impact of things." Superintendent A

Building trust and transparency emerge as foundational principles within the sub-theme. Superintendents acknowledge that open and transparent communication is essential for building

trust among stakeholders. By fostering an environment of transparency, leaders can mitigate misunderstandings, address concerns, and collectively work towards shared goals. The relationship between superintendents, school boards, and the community relies on mutual trust, as it creates the foundation for effective collaboration and meaningful dialogue.

"Because, at the end of the day, they already know the information. Their trust level in you rises. When people come with the mess, they are able to tell them the truth." Superintendent D

"And when you lower your trust now, you plan from behind and you try to explain something that might have happened which they have already heard." Superintendent D

Collaboration with mayors and alignment with community goals is another key aspect emphasized within Sub-Theme 2. Superintendents underscore the importance of aligning educational priorities with broader community objectives, particularly those set by local mayors and other stakeholders. This alignment not only strengthens the relationship between educational institutions and the community but also enables a collective effort to drive positive change. By working collaboratively with various stakeholders, superintendents can harness resources, expertise, and support from the community, creating a more comprehensive approach to school improvement.

"So you have to look at what is your community goal. Our community, Mayor, wants young families to move here, they want to replenish senior citizens' homes that they are selling with young people. So having a collective goal, the schools being better, the schools being viable, was the connection, because the mayor was trying to revitalize the city, but he couldn't do it without the school system." Superintendent C

In conclusion, the data find that effective collaboration, trust-building, and alignment with community goals contribute to a synergistic effort that fosters positive outcomes for students, schools, and the broader community.

Table 6

Theme 2

Major Theme 2: Collaborative Networks and Relationships	Sub-Theme 1: Importance of Collaborative Networks	Importance of collaborative networks Networking and collaboration for success Focus on diversity and underserved populations	<i>"We know from the literature that being involved in collaborative networks is an essential asset for someone leading school change."</i> <i>"Execute and not just talk about it and be philosophical..."</i> <i>"Spoon-feed people and not give it to them by the barrel..."</i> <i>"The big national superintendent organizations have more districts that are not in need of reform than they do."</i>
	Sub-Theme 2: School Board and Community Relations	Advocacy and legislative understanding Importance of trust and transparency Collaboration with mayors and community goals	<i>"I knew that that was going to be a major part of... understanding what was going on, why, and the impact of things."</i> <i>"And when you lower your trust now you plan for behind and you try to explain something that might have happened the way you said it."</i> <i>"So you have to look at, what is your community goal. Our community in Mayor, wants young families to move here, they want to replenish senior citizens' homes with young people. So having a collective goal, the schools being better, the schools being viable, was the connection, because the mayor was trying to revitalize the city, but he couldn't do it without the school system."</i>

Major Theme 3: Leadership Skills and Dynamics of Education System

RQ 2 How do long-standing, transformational school district leaders in Ohio, who were appointed to their positions through legislation, describe the implementation of successful reform efforts?

The concept of leadership has undergone dynamic and variable definitions, elucidated through diverse perspectives and methodological approaches within scholarly research and intellectual discourse (Elmuti et al., 2005). The approaches differ pertaining to the personality characteristics, influence, and different abilities, such as cognitive, social, and emotional, while relating to a group (Barnett & McCormick, 2012). In addition, the explanations also vary in terms of the behavioral styles of leaders reflecting the descriptive and normative aspects of leadership (Den Hartog & Koopamn, 2001). In sum, the concept of leadership is predominantly complex, multidimensional, and multi-component (Karagianni & Montgomery, 2018). The current theme probes into the essential qualities, skills, and strategies that effective superintendents employ to navigate the intricacies of the education system and lead transformative change. This theme underscores the multifaceted nature of educational leadership, encompassing skills ranging from visionary thinking to fostering collaboration while also exploring the challenges and dynamics unique to the education landscape. Through candid insights provided by the interviewed superintendents, this theme sheds light on the ways in which leadership skills and adaptability are instrumental in driving positive outcomes within schools and districts. The discussion within this theme encapsulates the dynamic interplay between visionary leadership, effective communication, and the ability to navigate complex systems, all of which are essential components for driving meaningful change in the educational sphere. This was evident in the codes referencing leadership skills and the Ohio Department of Education's report card system.

Sub-Theme 3.1. Leadership Skills and Traits for Success

The sub theme addresses the tapestry of qualities and aptitudes that are crucial for effective leadership in the realm of education. The insights garnered from the interviews

highlight the multifaceted nature of leadership, emphasizing the importance of having a clear vision, maintaining consistency, and fostering effective communication.

"A person has to have some vision of what success is. Because no one's gonna tell you what the vision is. Your board might have an idea, but you have to be able to put a vision with a plan." Superintendent D

The superintendents' accounts underscore the significance of a steadfast commitment to the educational mission, which entails being consistently dedicated and engaged while also remaining humble in the face of challenges.

"You have to articulate to people at their level. And be visible. I think that is important because, again, you're not gonna get the message across if you're not present. If you're not, you're gonna miss something." Superintendent D

The ability to collaborate and work as part of a cohesive team emerges as an essential trait, recognizing that leadership is not a solitary endeavor but one that thrives on shared efforts and insights.

"People get in trouble. When I let Ms. Brown come late everyone else may feel they can too. And then you're trying to build a team, and everybody sees your interests and what the expectations are, which then goes back to affect student achievement." Superintendent D

This sub-theme underscores that successful leadership envelop a blend of qualities that extend beyond individual prowess, encompassing the capacity to inspire, communicate, and collaborate effectively. By navigating a diverse range of leadership skills and traits, superintendents are better equipped to navigate the complex dynamics of the education system and drive positive change.

“Someone that can execute and not just talk about it and be philosophical, but actually knows how to implement strategy and execution.” Superintendent C

“Someone that knows how to build consensus, but also, at the end of the day, knows that democracy is overrated, and sometimes we just got to get it done. But there is a gift in building consensus and getting the majority of the people on board.”- Superintendent C

Sub-Theme 3.2. Ohio Department of Education's Report Card System

The sub-theme addresses and discusses the Ohio Department of Education's Report Card System to deliberate the complexities of how school districts are evaluated and ranked, enlightening the evolving landscape of accountability measures in the education system. The narratives shared by the superintendents offer insights into the changes witnessed over time in how schools are ranked and identified.

"I know last year they did The Stars. The Stars have people like us looking good. Then they came back out with the P-I to try to . . . you know what I'm saying because the P-I is predictable based upon socio-economics, but if you do the stars, it's more fair. But you're not gonna put out The Star Score because black people did okay within the law."
Superintendent C

The discussions exhibit the dynamic nature of accountability systems, which are subject to revisions based on various factors, including political considerations and evolving educational philosophies. The impact of these changes on the education landscape emerges as a significant point of consideration, as the modifications influence also how schools are perceived externally and how educators adapt their strategies to meet the evolving criteria.

The sub-theme also underscores the broader influence of accountability systems on educational practices. These systems can shape decision-making processes, influence resource

allocation, and drive schools' priorities. This impact extends beyond mere evaluation and encompasses the broader educational ecosystem.

"People's mindsets were ingrained from day one when accountability started, that it is truly a rank file and punish system"- Superintendent C.

The accounts from superintendents reveal the complexities of managing schools within this accountability framework, which necessitates continuous adaptation and alignment with the shifting standards. By exploring the changes in ranking and identification within the Ohio Department of Education's report card system, this sub-theme offers a window into the intricate relationship between accountability systems, policy changes, and their implications for school leadership and decision making.

Table 7

Theme 3

Major Theme 3: Leadership Skills and Dynamics of Education System	Sub-Theme 1: Leadership Skills and Traits for Success	Vision, consistency, and communication Presence and Visibility Collaboration and teamwork Skills and traits for successful leadership	<i>"What you have to be is, um consistent with the vision. People are easily distracted and fall off with, you know, it's just easy. You gotta be consistent with the plan."</i> <i>"You have to be articulated to people at their level. And, um, I'm trying to think of something else like visible. I think that's important because, again, you're not gonna get the information message present."</i> <i>"So, I'm trying to think of something else, gotta be a team player. And I say that's important, because sometimes you be chief, and sometimes you the Indian."</i> <i>"Actively involved knowledgeable, intelligent..."</i> <i>"Build consensus and getting the majority of the people on board..."</i>
	Sub-Theme 2: Ohio Department of	Changes in ranking and identification	<i>"I know last year they did The Stars. The Stars have people like us looking good. Then they came back out with the P-I to try to, you know what I'm saying because the P-I is predictable based upon um you know social economics but if you do the stars, it's more, fair. But</i>

	Education's Report Card System	Impact of accountability systems	<p><i>you're not gonna put out The Stars Star Score because black people did okay within the law."</i></p> <p><i>"people's mindsets were ingrained from day one when accountability started, that it is truly a rank file and punish system."</i></p>
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Major Findings

Based on the analysis, results, and discussions presented in the study, three major findings emerge that provide valuable insights into the challenges and strategies involved in leading school improvement efforts:

Major Finding 1: Appointed Superintendents to Failing School Districts in Ohio Described their Motivations and the Challenges of School Improvement Leadership in Avoiding Further State Sanctions on their Districts (RQ 1)

One of the study's primary findings is the multifaceted nature of motivations and challenges that superintendents face in taking on leadership roles within struggling school districts. The motivations to lead range from personal connections rooted in family backgrounds to a demonstrated track record of success in turnaround situations. The desire to positively impact student success and equity emerges as a common thread, with personal experiences and a passion for education driving superintendents' decisions. However, complex challenges often counterbalance these motivations, including navigating rigid state frameworks, addressing diversity and poverty-related issues, and adapting to changing state laws. The study reveals that while the motivations are powerful drivers, the challenges inherent in school improvement are equally demanding and require adaptive leadership approaches.

Major Finding 2: Appointed Superintendents to Failing School Districts in Ohio Described the Establishment of Collaborative Educational Networks and Key Relationships (inside and outside of education) as Depictions of their Successful Reform Leadership Efforts (RQ 2)

The study underscores the importance of collaborative networks and relationship-building in the success of school improvement efforts. Collaborative networks, both local and regional, play a crucial role in providing a platform for superintendents to share experiences, strategies, and best practices. These networks serve as valuable resources for navigating challenges and finding innovative solutions. Furthermore, the significance of strong school board and community relations emerges as a key factor in achieving successful school improvement outcomes. Building trust, transparency, and collaboration with various stakeholders, including mayors and community members, enhances the superintendent's ability to create a cohesive vision and garner support for reform initiatives.

Major Finding 3: Appointed Superintendents to Failing School Districts in Ohio Described as Key Elements of Transformational Leadership and in Depictions of their Successful Reform Leadership Efforts Specific Leadership Skills Necessary to Navigate Dynamic Education Systems (RQs 1 and 2)

The third major finding centers on the essential leadership skills and traits contributing to success in the dynamic education system. Vision, consistency, effective communication, and humility are identified as crucial leadership attributes that empower superintendents to steer their districts toward positive change. The ability to collaborate effectively, demonstrate presence, and embrace a team-oriented approach reinforces the notion that transformational leadership is vital in driving school improvement. Furthermore, the study sheds light on the dynamic nature of the

Ohio Department of Education's report card system, highlighting its impact on schools' ranking and identification. The system's evolution underscores the need for adaptability in leadership strategies to align with shifting accountability measures.

Universal best practices exist in leadership that transcends organizational boundaries, applying equally across various levels and contexts of leadership. These foundational principles include effective communication, ethical decision making, fostering a culture of continuous improvement, and the ability to inspire and motivate others. Regardless of the sector or the scale of the organization, these core practices are critical for effective leadership, driving both individual and organizational success. By adhering to these universal standards, leaders can navigate the complexities of their roles more effectively, creating environments that encourage innovation, collaboration, and resilience.

Discussion

The study's first significant finding delves into the intricate interplay of motivations and challenges confronting superintendents in leadership positions within struggling school districts. Their motivations to lead are diverse, spanning from personal familial ties to a history of successful turnarounds. Common among these motivations is a dedication to fostering student success and equity, driven by personal experiences and a fervent passion for education. However, these motivations are often balanced against complex challenges such as navigating inflexible state frameworks, addressing issues of diversity and poverty, and adapting to ever-changing state regulations. The study emphasizes that while motivations provide a strong impetus, the rigorous challenges inherent in school improvement necessitate adaptable leadership approaches.

The second major finding underscores the pivotal role of collaborative networks and relationship-building in the triumph of school improvement initiatives. Local and regional collaborative networks prove indispensable platforms for superintendents to exchange experiences, strategies, and best practices. These networks offer valuable resources for overcoming hurdles and generating innovative solutions. Moreover, the study underscores the importance of cultivating strong relationships with school boards and communities, pivotal factors in achieving successful school improvement outcomes. The establishment of trust, transparency, and collaboration with a range of stakeholders, including community members and mayors, enhances the superintendent's ability to create a unified vision and garner support for reform endeavors.

The third significant finding centers on the essential leadership attributes contributing to success within the dynamic education landscape. Vision, consistency, effective communication, and humility emerge as vital traits that empower superintendents to steer their districts toward positive change. Effective collaboration, a commanding presence, and a team-oriented approach further highlight the essential role of transformational leadership in driving school improvement. The study also sheds light on the dynamic nature of the Ohio Department of Education's report card system, which significantly influences schools' rankings and identification. The system's evolution underscores the imperative of adaptable leadership strategies that can align with shifting accountability measures.

The federal government's push for educational reform, notably through accountability measures, often falls short in providing necessary support to school leaders at the helm of these reforms. This gap leaves leaders navigating complex changes with insufficient resources, training, or guidance impacting the effectiveness and sustainability of reform efforts (Ravitch,

2013). The lack of tailored support not only hampers the implementation of reforms but also places undue stress on leaders tasked with meeting federal standards without the requisite tools or assistance.

In discussing these findings collectively, they illuminate the intricate and multifaceted realm of school improvement leadership. The motivations and challenges encountered by superintendents underscore the necessity of a well-rounded skill set and an unwavering dedication to student success. Collaborative networks and relationship-building platforms facilitate the exchange of knowledge and the alignment of diverse stakeholders toward a shared objective. Effective leadership skills, encompassing visionary thinking and adaptive communication, emerge as pivotal components in skillfully navigating the ever-evolving landscape of education reform. Overall, these findings illuminate the intricate interplay between personal motivations, leadership strategies, collaborative networks, and the evolving educational system. They offer valuable insights for current and aspiring educational leaders, policymakers, and researchers who seek to drive positive transformation within struggling school districts. By acknowledging and addressing the motivations, challenges, collaborative opportunities, and leadership dynamics revealed in this study, stakeholders can collaboratively work towards achieving substantial improvements in education systems and, ultimately, enhancing student outcomes.

The emerging themes of continuous improvement, change, and the political aspects of leadership as identified from the study participants' responses offer profound insights into the multifaceted nature of effective leadership within educational reform. These elements collectively underscore the complexity of leading an educational institution, where leaders must not only foster an environment of constant improvement across various dimensions but also

navigate the fluid dynamics of change with agility and foresight. Furthermore, the emphasis on the political roles of leaders highlights the necessity of possessing skills beyond academic management, including the ability to negotiate, advocate, and build consensus among diverse stakeholders. This impact on leadership illuminates the critical balance between academic prowess and political savvy, suggesting that successful educational reform requires a leader who is adept at managing both the internal aspirations of the organization for continuous growth and the external pressures and opportunities that change brings. In essence, these insights contribute significantly to the broader discourse on leadership, suggesting that effective leaders in education, and indeed in any sector, must be versatile, forward-thinking, and capable of inspiring collective progress towards shared goals.

Summary

These major findings provide key discoveries that shed light on the intricate and diverse terrain of leadership in school improvement. The motivations and challenges experienced by superintendents underscore the significance of a well-rounded skill set and a steadfast commitment to student success. Collaborative networks and relationship-building provide a platform for sharing expertise and facilitate the alignment of diverse stakeholders toward a common goal. Effective leadership skills, including visionary thinking and adaptive communication, emerge as crucial components in navigating the ever-changing education reform landscape. Networking and building meaningful alliances, along with the process of recreating district narratives, emerged as essential components in the analysis of findings, grounded in the perspectives shared through participant interviews. These elements played a pivotal role in the interpretation and understanding of the study's results.

Taken together, these findings underscore the dynamic interaction among individual motivations, leadership approaches, collaborative networks, and the ever-changing educational landscape. They offer valuable insights for current and aspiring educational leaders, policymakers, and researchers aiming to foster positive change in struggling school districts. By acknowledging and addressing the motivations, challenges, collaborative opportunities, and leadership dynamics identified in this study, stakeholders can work together to drive meaningful improvements in education systems and, ultimately, enhance student outcomes.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this qualitative (narrative) study was to understand how long-standing, transformational school district leaders in Ohio, who were appointed to their positions through legislation, described and implemented mandated reform efforts. The central questions of the study were:

- 1 How do long-standing, transformational school district leaders in Ohio, who were appointed to their positions through legislation, describe successful reform efforts?
- 2 How do long-standing, transformational school district leaders in Ohio, who were appointed to their positions through legislation, describe the implementation of successful reform efforts?

Despite the annual turnover rate of 14% to 16% for school superintendents, a significant 85% of superintendents across the nation have persisted in their roles despite facing elevated stress levels related to the expectations of the job (EAB, 2023; Nier, 2023). As per Rand (2022), superintendents in urban districts and those serving predominantly students of color were found to be less inclined to contemplate leaving their positions compared to their counterparts in rural and suburban districts. The present research reinforced the notion that successful superintendents required robust collaborative networks and comprehensive understandings of dynamic education systems to effectively drive reform efforts.

In this final chapter, the researcher embarks on a profound journey into the depths of educational leadership, guided by the narratives and experiences of the four distinguished superintendents who participated in the study. The narratives within are a tapestry of insights woven from the candid responses provided during in-depth interviews. These interviews served

as windows into the intricate worlds of transformational leadership, uncovering layers of meaning, challenges, and triumphs. Transformational leadership within the educational realm is a complex interplay of various elements. It is an intricate dance between vision, adaptability, resilience, and an unswerving commitment to the betterment of educational landscapes. The objective of Chapter 5 is to unravel this complexity, presenting not just an analysis but a holistic interpretation of these educational leaders' experiences.

To gain insights into the essential qualities that enabled long-serving superintendents to successfully navigate school reform and district transformation, I delved into the real-world experiences of practicing superintendents to discern recurring success patterns. Throughout the interview process, I deepened my comprehension of participants' professional journeys, perceived obstacles to success, personal driving factors, and strategies to effect positive changes in their school districts. The examination of the literature revealed that state mandates, influenced by federal legislation, necessitated school leaders to adeptly navigate various leadership styles for effectiveness. Consequently, this study's thorough scrutiny of four school superintendents offers authentic glimpses into their lives and experiences. The study aimed to uncover commonalities in the journeys of these four superintendents who successfully transformed their respective school districts.

The superintendents in focus embodied a plethora of roles — change agents, mentors, visionaries, and much more. Within their narratives lie the nuances of their motivations, the barriers they encountered, and the strategies they employed to navigate through often turbulent seas of failing educational systems. As the study probed into their stories, it aimed to unearth the emerging themes and patterns, granting readers a profound understanding of the multifaceted roles these leaders undertook. Effective superintendents adeptly navigate their primary

responsibilities as instructional, political, and managerial leaders by skillfully adapting to the intertwined dynamics of historical, community, and organizational characteristics (Starr, 2020). In fulfilling both managerial and leadership roles, superintendents embrace the complexities of their work and develop a set of traits to successfully navigate school reform, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Primary Roles of the Superintendent in Historical, Community, and Organizational Contexts



Source: Adapted from “Leading to Change: The Challenge of the New Superintendency,” by S. Johnson, 1996. Copyright 1996 by Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Summary of Findings and Implications

The superintendents involved in this study collaborated with state leaders to enhance academic standings, thus preventing state takeovers. Additionally, they demonstrated fiscal

responsibility by implementing mandates without adequate funding. Within the narratives of these leaders, the researcher encountered the crux of educational leadership for longstanding superintendents who successfully navigated legislative reforms with their districts, thus providing a roadmap for future leaders, which included motivations that drove changes, resilience that allowed leaders to counter challenges, and nuanced strategies leaders used to pave the way for transformation in failing educational domains. These findings represent not just the experiences of individual superintendents but a broader panorama of transformational leadership within the educational sphere. Although the study included three male and one female superintendents, the data collected were insufficient to support a conclusive finding.

According to Kotter (2012), change leadership theory (Wojciechowski et al., 2016) defined the requisite leadership style for successfully guiding school districts involved in legislative reform endeavors. Lewin's Change Model (Hussain et al., 2018), specifically Step 1, unfreezing, emphasizes that an adept leader must tackle the underlying causes of identified challenges to secure favorable outcomes. Examining the situation through diverse perspectives offered varied insights that contributed to a comprehensive understanding of their shared experiences as leaders driving change.

The potential for superintendents to effectively navigate legislative reforms and transform their school districts was challenging due to the dynamic and rigid education systems in place. However, superintendents who demonstrated enduring tenures in their roles managed to achieve significant progress. Notably, superintendents grappled with inherent challenges and contended with external legislative conflicts such as school choice, state takeover, and mandated reforms. Advocates for school reform, dating back to the 1960s with President Lyndon B. Johnson, aimed to provide education to all citizens regardless of race and economic status, with recent efforts

focusing on raising academic standards (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2003). The literature review revealed that, despite these intentions, as legislative reforms were implemented, superintendents continue facing obstacles that impede their efforts to transform school districts, particularly due to the evolving policies and systems of accountability (Hess, 2023).

The participant interviews underscored crucial aspects of leadership, networks, and the dynamics of education systems. The primary inquiry guiding the study was as follows: How do long-standing, transformational leaders in Ohio, who were appointed to their positions through legislation, describe successful reform efforts? The subsequent sections delineate the findings in connection with these supporting questions. In the following discussion I have also related the key findings of this research with the salient points noted in the literature review and in the conceptual framework.

Summary and Findings: Major Theme 1 - Motivations, Challenges, and Leadership

RQ 1 How do long-standing, transformational school district leaders in Ohio who were appointed to their positions through legislation describe successful reform efforts?)

This major theme delves into the fundamental aspects that drove transformational leadership among superintendents tasked with the daunting challenges of leading underperforming school districts. Within this theme, seven critical sub-themes emerged, each shedding light on distinct facets of their experiences and approaches.

The motivations driving long-standing superintendents to undertake leadership roles in struggling school districts emerged from a rich tapestry of personal values, past experiences, demonstrated successes, and unwavering commitments to educational equity. These profound motivations not only defined superintendents' purposes but also fueled their relentless determination to navigate and surmount the intricate challenges that inherently accompanied the

tasks of transforming underperforming schools, which also included the superintendents' values, past experiences, demonstrated successes, equity, and a sense of purpose.

Superintendents in the study often found their motivations deeply rooted in their personal values. These values encompassed deeply seeded beliefs in the power of education to transform students' lives and communities. For many, the drive to uplift struggling districts stemmed from moral obligations and senses of social responsibility to provide equal opportunities and quality education to all students, regardless of their circumstances.

The experiences transformational superintendents garnered throughout their careers, especially those involving successful turnarounds or meaningful impacts in previous roles, significantly influenced their decisions to take on the challenging mantles of superintendents in failing districts. Positive past experiences emboldened them, fostering beliefs that their leadership could affect transformative changes, even in the most challenging educational contexts.

Having previously demonstrated success in improving educational outcomes fueled transformative superintendents' motivations. The desire to replicate their successes, prove their capabilities, and enhance their professional legacies impelled them to tackle struggling districts head-on. These motivations were intertwined with a sense of professional pride and a thirst for achieving lasting impacts on educational landscapes.

A fundamental motivation for assuming leadership in struggling districts was a deep-rooted commitment by transformative superintendents to educational equity. Superintendents viewed their roles as a means to bridge gaps in educational opportunities and outcomes. They envisioned systems where every student, regardless of their background, could access high-quality education and have equal chances of success.

A profound sense of purpose was a central motivation to the four superintendents in this study. The superintendents felt compelled to make tangible, positive differences in the lives of their students and communities. This sense of purpose acted as a driving force during the inevitable challenges they faced. It imbued the work of the superintendents with meaning, underscoring their resilience and dedication to surmount hurdles in pursuit of lasting change. In essence, the motivations that drove superintendents to lead struggling school districts were multifaceted and deeply personal. Their motivations were embedded in a profound belief in educational equity, commitments to improving lives through education, and desires to replicate past successes. These motivations were vital, propelling them to embrace demanding responsibilities that came with leadership in underperforming districts, thereby setting trajectories for meaningful transformations.

Findings: Sub-Theme 1.2 - Challenges and Barriers to School Improvement

The challenges and barriers encountered by superintendents in their pursuits of school improvement in underperforming districts revealed complex landscapes. As they strove to uplift educational standards and outcomes, superintendents in the study confronted a multitude of hurdles that demanded a delicate balance between adhering to state frameworks and implementing customized solutions. These challenges highlighted transformative superintendents' resilience and underscored the potential of their leadership by allowing superintendents to adapt to instructional and leadership frameworks, address diversity and poverty, and understand policy.

One significant challenge faced by transformative superintendents was in adapting to state frameworks and educational policies. Superintendents must navigate a sea of regulations, guidelines, and mandates set forth by state education departments. Adherence to these

frameworks is critical for funding, compliance, and accountability. However, tailoring these broad policies to suit the unique needs and circumstances of their districts was a complex task, which demanded a delicate balance between following state directives and implementing contextually appropriate solutions.

The diversity within the student body and the prevalence of poverty presented formidable challenges. Superintendents in the study grappled with the imperative to ensure inclusive and equitable educational experiences for all students, regardless of socioeconomic or cultural backgrounds. This required innovative strategies to bridge the achievement gaps and provide targeted supports to disadvantaged students. Moreover, tackling the multifaceted aspects of poverty that impacted learning, such as limited resources and lack of parental support demanded creative and tailored interventions.

A pivotal challenge for transformative superintendents was striking a delicate balance between policy adherence and the need for customized, contextually relevant solutions. Although state frameworks provided a roadmap, the unique circumstances of failing districts often necessitated tailored approaches. Superintendents faced the constant tension between aligning with state policies and making necessary adaptations to address specific challenges within their districts. This balance required nuanced decision making and thorough understanding of policy implications.

In essence, the challenges and barriers within the educational domains were intricate and demanded a judicious interplay between policy compliance and customized solutions. Superintendents adapted to state frameworks, addressed diverse needs of students, and navigated the complexities of poverty. The resilience demonstrated by these superintendents in overcoming

challenges underscored the transformative potential of their leadership in reshaping failing districts and steering them toward educational excellence.

Findings: Sub-Theme 1.3 - Overcoming Challenges and Stereotypes

The sub-theme of Overcoming Challenges and Stereotypes sheds light on how superintendents actively worked to transcend barriers and misconceptions that impeded school improvement. Their efforts were marked by proactive communication, strategic decision making, and a steadfast commitment to fostering cultures of understanding. This sub-theme underscored transformative superintendents' pivotal roles as change agents in challenging prevalent misconceptions and stereotypes that hindered progress in underperforming school districts. To overcome these challenges and stereotypes, transformative superintendents effectively communicated, made strategic decisions, and fostered cultures of understanding.

Superintendents employed proactive communication as powerful tools to overcome challenges and stereotypes. They engaged in transparent, clear, and consistent communications with all stakeholders, including teachers, parents, students, and the broader community. By disseminating accurate and timely information regarding their visions, strategies, and progress, superintendents built trust and dispelled misconceptions. Clear communication ensured that everyone was on the same page, aligned with the goals of school improvement, and ready to contribute to the collective effort.

Strategic decision making was a cornerstone of superintendents' approaches to overcoming challenges and stereotypes. They carefully analyzed the unique circumstances of their districts to identify specific areas where stereotypes or misconceptions hindered progress. Through data-driven insights and deep understandings of their communities, they made informed

decisions. These decisions challenged prevailing stereotypes and paved the way for targeted interventions that directly addressed the identified challenges.

Superintendents understood the importance of fostering cultures of understanding within their districts. They championed diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, promoting environments where differing perspectives and backgrounds were celebrated. By actively addressing stereotypes and biases, they created an atmosphere of respect, empathy, and collaboration. This inclusive culture not only dismantled barriers but also enhanced unity, cooperation, and collective commitment to the common goal of educational improvement.

A requisite for superintendents was to adopt proactive and strategic approaches to counter challenges and stereotypes. Their communication strategies aimed to keep all stakeholders informed and aligned and using strategic decision making guided by data and deep understandings of their districts. Moreover, their efforts to foster inclusive and understanding cultures challenged stereotypes, ultimately paving the way for transformative change within their educational landscapes. Through these deliberate actions, superintendents served as catalysts for positive transformation, challenging misconceptions and fostering environments conducive to growth and progress in struggling school districts.

Findings: Sub-Theme 1.4 - Accountability and Data-Driven Decision-Making

Sub-Theme 1.4 delves into the critical role of accountability and data-driven decision making in the leadership of superintendents aiming to drive school improvement. This sub-theme highlighted change leader's reliance on data to shape strategies and make informed decisions, underlining the transformative potential of data-driven approaches in educational contexts. This sub-theme also explored the importance of leveraging data and monitoring progress, along with transparency and accountability.

Superintendents recognized the power of data as a strategic tool for gaining insights into various aspects of school performance. They harnessed data to understand student achievement levels, attendance patterns, and engagement rates. This data-driven approach allowed them to identify trends, patterns, and areas that required improvement. By meticulously analyzing data, they gained comprehensive understandings of their districts' strengths and weaknesses, thus informing the formulation of effective strategies. By constantly evaluating the impact of implemented strategies, they made real-time adjustments, ensuring that interventions were yielding the desired outcomes. This iterative process of using data to track progress facilitated agile decision making and ensured that districts remain on course toward their improvement goals.

Superintendents emphasized transparency and accountability by openly sharing data with stakeholders. They promoted cultures of accountability by presenting data on student achievement, attendance, and other critical metrics. This transparency held all stakeholders accountable for their roles in improvement processes, including teachers, parents, and communities. Moreover, sharing successes and challenges based on data cultivated senses of collective responsibility, fostering a collaborative environment to achieve positive outcomes.

Data were the cornerstone of superintendents' decision-making processes. They relied on data to guide their strategies, monitor progress, and foster transparency and accountability within their districts. This sub-theme highlighted how leveraging data as a strategic tool equipped superintendents to make informed decisions, monitor the effectiveness of their actions, and uphold accountability at all levels. Through data-driven approaches, superintendents paved the way for sustainable improvements and enhanced educational outcomes in underperforming school districts.

Findings: Sub-Theme 1.5 - Superintendent Turnover and Decision Factors

Sub-Theme 1.5 delves into the challenges faced by new superintendents and the intricate decision factors that influenced their tenure. It underscored the steep learning curve they encountered, emphasizing the need for adaptability, resilience, and strategic acumen in navigating the complexities of district leadership through acknowledging the learning curve and building relationships, decision making, and other external factors.

New superintendents faced formidable learning curves as they transitioned into their roles. They grappled with the complexities of educational systems, district dynamics, and community expectations. Initial challenges included understanding the nuances of district operations, building relationships with stakeholders, and gaining insights into each district's specific needs. This learning curve necessitated proactive approaches to continuous learning and adaptation.

Establishing meaningful relationships with stakeholders, including school boards, staff, parents, and the community, emerged as a critical skill for superintendents. Building trust and rapport was vital for gaining support and aligning everyone toward common visions. Effective communication, active listening, and engagement efforts were pivotal in establishing these relationships, ultimately impacting each superintendent's effectiveness and tenure.

The ability to make strategic decisions in rapidly changing educational landscapes was key to a superintendent's success and longevity. They had to adapt swiftly to policy shifts, emerging educational trends, and societal dynamics. Strategic decision-making involves aligning district goals with available resources and effectively prioritizing initiatives to ensure maximum impact. Superintendents who demonstrated adaptability and agility in decision making tended to navigate challenges effectively and contributed to sustained district improvement.

External factors, such as political influences and economic conditions, significantly impacted superintendents' decisions and tenure. Negotiating these external dynamics while maintaining a positive relationship with the school board was crucial. Superintendents had to navigate board relations, ensure they were aligned with the board's vision while maintaining autonomy and decision-making authority to drive necessary changes for district improvement.

Superintendent turnover was driven by various factors, highlighting the challenging responsibilities inherent in their positions. Newly appointed superintendents encountered a significant learning curve, necessitating proficiency in fostering relationships, making strategic decisions, and adapting to intricate external dynamics. An emphasis on proactive and strategic district leadership was essential for effectively navigating these complexities.

Findings: Sub-Theme 1.6 - Successful Strategies for Failing Districts

Sub-Theme 1.6 delves into the strategies employed by superintendents to drive positive transformations and uplift struggling districts. It emphasized the significance of maintaining a continuous improvement trajectory, showcasing relentless dedication as a catalyst for effecting positive change and instilled a culture of continuous growth and development within the district. This sub-theme discusses the importance of the continuous improvement trajectory, decision making, engaging stakeholders, adhering to learning standards, fostering consistency, and focusing on student learning.

Central to the success strategies for failing districts was the unwavering commitment to maintaining a continuous improvement trajectory. Superintendents prioritized a persistent focus on school improvement initiatives. This included regular assessments, data-driven decision making, and agile adjustments to strategies based on ongoing feedback and evaluation. The focus on continuous improvement underscored a culture of adaptability and growth within the district.

Successful superintendents place significant emphasis on adhering to prescribed learning standards. They ensure that curriculum and instruction align with these standards, focusing on providing quality education to all students. Adherence to learning standards serves as a foundational element in driving improvements, enabling a comprehensive and structured approach to education. Superintendents prioritize aligning all efforts to ensure students' academic achievements and holistic development. They emphasize tailored interventions, additional support mechanisms, and personalized attention to students who need it, aiming to uplift every student academically and socially.

Superintendents consistently strive to foster fairness and consistency within the district. This involves ensuring equitable allocation of resources, fair treatment of students and staff, and uniform implementation of policies. Fairness and consistency contribute to a positive and harmonious school environment, reinforcing trust and motivation among stakeholders.

The success strategies employed by superintendents for failing districts underscore the paramount importance of maintaining a continuous improvement trajectory through stakeholder engagement, adherence to learning standards, and a focus on fairness. These strategies collectively contribute to cultivating a culture of growth and development, which is vital for transforming struggling districts into thriving educational institutions.

Findings: Sub-Theme 1.7 - Personal Impact and Student Focus

Sub-Theme 1.7 delves into the personal impact of superintendents and their dedication to student-centered leadership on district success. The focus revolves around the profound commitment of these leaders to ensure that every decision is driven by the best interests of the students, fostering a shared commitment within the school community to enhance student outcomes by focusing on student-centered decision making, holistic student development,

enhanced educational opportunities, a supportive learning environment, engaging with parents, as well as encouragement and recognition.

Superintendents exhibit a student-centric approach in their decision-making processes. The primary consideration is always the well-being and educational progress of the students. This approach influences decisions regarding curriculum development, resource allocation, teaching methodologies, and support programs. By prioritizing students in decision making, superintendents create an environment where the needs and aspirations of the students are central to all actions and policies.

A significant aspect of superintendents' focus was on student success. They aimed to foster environments that encouraged not only academic excellence but also the overall growth of each student. This included nurturing extracurricular activities, character development, and emotional well-being. Superintendents actively promoted programs and initiatives that catered to diverse student needs, thus ensuring well-rounded educational experiences. This involved introducing advanced courses, partnerships with educational institutions, exposure to industry-relevant skills, and enrichment programs. By broadening students' educational horizons, superintendents prepared students for a competitive world, empowering them to achieve their aspirations.

Superintendents were ardent advocates for creating a supportive learning environment. They prioritize fostering positive relationships, promoting inclusivity, and ensuring that students feel safe and supported. This encompasses initiatives to prevent bullying, enhance mental health support, and establish an inclusive culture where every student is valued and respected.

The personal impact of superintendents and their student-centered leadership significantly contributes to district success and collectively creates a conducive environment for

students to flourish academically and personally. This student-focused approach is fundamental to the success of educational districts and the future success of their students.

Findings: Major Theme 2 - Collaborative Networks and Relationships

RQ 2. How do long-standing, transformational school district leaders in Ohio, who were appointed to their positions through legislation, describe the implementation of successful reform efforts?)

Major Theme 2 delves into the crucial aspects of Collaborative Networks and Relationships within the educational leadership landscape. The theme explores the pivotal role of collaborative networks and emphasizes the significance of building strong relationships with the school board and the community.

Collaborative networks extend beyond mere information exchange. They are powerful instruments for driving change by encouraging collective learning, empowerment, and inclusivity. Recognizing diverse voices within these networks aligns with the overarching goal of effecting meaningful and sustainable improvements in educational outcomes for all students. The networks discussed by the superintendents within the study focused primarily on collective learning and knowledge sharing, as well as empowerment and inclusivity. These networks empower educational leaders by providing a platform to voice their ideas and concerns. Inclusivity is promoted by ensuring that all stakeholders, irrespective of their position or background, have equal opportunities to contribute.

Building strong relationships with the school board and the community is crucial (The Education Trust, 2021). Effective collaboration, trust building, and alignment with community goals are identified as paramount factors contributing to a synergistic effort that fosters positive outcomes for students, schools, and the broader community. Superintendents harnessed the

power of collaborative decision making, along with community engagement, and trust building. Involving the school board ensures a more comprehensive perspective and aids in effectively implementing decisions. The collaborative approach encourages a collective vision, where the interests of the school board and educational leaders are aligned for the benefit of the students and the overall educational system.

This theme underscores the imperative of collaborative efforts and relationships in realizing meaningful improvements in the educational landscape.

Findings: Major Theme 3 - Leadership Skills and Dynamics of Education System

RQ 2. How do long-standing, transformational school district leaders in Ohio, who were appointed to their positions through legislation, describe the implementation of successful reform efforts?)

Major Theme 3 delved into the essential aspects of leadership skills and the dynamics influenced by educational systems. The theme explored how successful leadership entails a blend of traits and skills that transcend individual capabilities. It also delves into the influence of accountability systems, particularly Ohio's Department of Education's Report Card System, on educational practices and decision-making.

Sub-Theme 3.1 - Leadership Skills and Traits for Success

Successful leadership was a composite of various qualities that extended beyond personal aptitudes. Effective leaders possessed the ability to inspire, communicate, and collaborate efficiently. By encompassing diverse ranges of skills and traits, educational leaders, particularly superintendents, were better positioned to navigate the intricate dynamics of education systems and instigate positive transformations through a cadre of versatile leadership skills.

The data illuminated that successful superintendents exhibited a range of leadership skills. These included adaptability, strategic thinking, emotional intelligence, and capacities to foster collaboration. These versatile skills equipped superintendents to respond dynamically to evolving educational landscapes, manage complexities, and lead their teams effectively. Superintendents who rallied their teams and stakeholders around shared visions fostered environments of enthusiasm and commitment. Their inspirational leadership styles nurtured a sense of purpose and encouraged collective efforts toward achieving educational goals.

For example, when superintendents used the Ohio Department of Education's Report Card System as a decision-making tool, it was clear that their leadership extended beyond mere evaluations to significantly shape decision-making processes, resource allocations, and school priorities. Superintendents continuously adapted their approaches and strategies to align with shifting standards and expectations. This necessitated proactive approaches to policy comprehension and rapid integration of policy changes into educational practices.

Successful leaders amalgamated diverse skills and traits, demonstrated adaptability, inspired teams, and fostered collaboration. Superintendents navigated these complexities by aligning strategies, embracing continuous adaptation, and ensuring policy compliance. The importance of versatile leadership and proactive response to external accountability frameworks to steer positive change within the education sector were vital.

Implications for Practice

The participants did not conceptualize transformation as a simplistic, one-dimensional endeavor. Rather, their perspectives suggested that successful transformation necessitated a multifaceted approach, encompassing not only policy considerations but also a fundamental focus on organizational culture. According to Bush (2011), effective school leadership is

complex and multifaceted and is influenced by multiple leadership styles. The outcomes further indicated that a singular, definitive leadership quality did not stand out as paramount; instead, a combination of various qualities collectively contributed to effectiveness. Lewin's Change Theory proposes that individuals are influenced by restraining forces, or obstacles that counter driving forces aimed at keeping the status quo (Wojciechowski et al., 2016). The data have demonstrated that reform leaders can effectively employ three types of leadership: change leadership, instructional leadership, and entrepreneurial leadership (Brolund, 2016; Kassai, 2022; Minnesota Department of Education, 2019). The study revealed that various theories support effective leadership characteristics for school reform leaders. Change leadership (Tapia & Walker, 2020), for instance, emphasizes the importance of granting explicit permission to fail as a means of fostering learning. It recognizes healthy failure as a vital component of both individual and organizational development. The instructional leadership model (Xhomara, 2019) underscores the role of school leadership in managing different tasks related to teaching and learning, thus contributing to effective educational outcomes. Similarly, entrepreneurial leadership (Gupta et al., 2004; Renko et al., 2015; Simba & Thai, 2019) draws from leadership and entrepreneurship literature, focusing on the ability to navigate dynamic market changes and inspire followers to achieve organizational objectives, thereby enhancing overall effectiveness.

Resilience emerges as a pivotal implication for superintendents aiming to navigate school reform successfully. This attribute is indispensable as it enables leaders to withstand the inevitable challenges and setbacks inherent in the process of reform. Superintendents, endowed with resilience, can maintain their focus and drive towards achieving educational improvements despite facing obstacles or resistance. This resilience not only fosters a culture of persistence and determination within the school district but also serves as a model for others in the educational

community (Patterson et al., 2004). It underscores the importance of adaptability, continuous learning, and the ability to rebound from difficulties with enhanced strategies and insights (Henderson & Milstein, 2003). Hence, for superintendents leading the charge of school reform, cultivating resilience is not just a personal asset but a critical component of their leadership that significantly influences the success and sustainability of reform initiatives (Fullan et al., 2007).

The data also underscored the significance of mindset and paradigm shifts in adeptly navigating the complexities of school reform. To ensure that the shift occurs, the data revealed that successful transformation school leaders navigating mandated reform should assess any restructuring or organizational shifts, taking note of novel leadership models, state mandates, and recently introduced initiatives within their district (Stredrick, 2023). This shift in perspective will depersonalize ongoing changes and focus directly on their impact on the organization. Through organizational analysis, I suggest that school leaders will gain a broader understanding, internalize new strategies, grasp levels of accountability, and embrace forthcoming changes. Additionally, I suggest leaders will be able to identify key contacts in the new structures through the restructuring process, determining necessary interactions for success and reflecting on collaborative efforts needed to manage the changes. I further suggest that with the newly developed structure school leaders will identify allies and support networks that will provide transformational school leaders with the opportunity to cultivate their internal community amidst these transformations.

Given the dynamic nature of legislative school reform, I suggest that superintendents grasp strategic leadership practices through training and mentoring tailored to achieving reform objectives outlined by legislation. Through training and mentoring, I suggest that superintendents will develop and learn strategic decision-making strategies essential for navigating the impact of

reforms effectively. To this end, it is recommended that superintendents focus on cultivating specific leadership qualities.

I strongly recommend that superintendents leading districts engaged in reform efforts also prioritize training in visionary thinking, empathetic understanding, and effective communication. These qualities are instrumental in motivating teams towards a shared mission, fostering collaboration, and ultimately driving successful implementation of reform initiatives (Wilson Heenan et al., 2023NCU). By honing these leadership skills, superintendents can better navigate the complexities of legislative school reform and steer their districts towards meaningful progress and achievement of reform goals.

Limitations

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how long-standing, transformational school district leaders in Ohio, who were appointed to their positions through legislation, described and implemented mandated reform efforts. The research focused on a sample population comprising more than 50 schools in the state of Ohio, each with their superintendent subject to legislative reform efforts. It is important to note that the results were limited to the four individuals interviewed for the study. The findings of this study, based on interviews with four teacher superintendents and documents collected from them, may have limitations as they are confined to the perspectives of those individuals. Furthermore, the study focused on urban or suburban/urban school districts with majority-minority populations, which may not represent all types of school districts engaged in legislative reform efforts. It is also worth noting that the superintendents in the study led districts engaged in state monitoring, identified by the State of Ohio's Report Card, which may not be typical in other districts implementing improvement strategies.

Despite these limitations, the researcher aimed to authentically capture the experiences of the superintendents in terms of their leadership during legislative reform and the traits necessary for success. Given the positive outcomes of this study, boards of education could potentially use it as a reference when identifying the characteristics required for selecting superintendents they may choose to lead their districts. Likewise, aspiring superintendents interested in leading reform districts may find valuable insights in this study to inform their professional development and preparation for future leadership roles.

Recommendations for Future Research

Exploring the efficacy of long-standing transformational school district leaders, appointed through legislative mandates, sheds light on the broader topic of education policy priorities worldwide. With a heightened emphasis on increased school autonomy and improved academic outcomes, the role of school leaders necessitates reevaluation (Pont et al., 2008). Understanding the influence of legislation on leaders' decision-making processes is paramount in this context. Transformative school leaders navigating reform develop conditions for school leadership better suited to respond to current and future educational environments. Effective school leadership is pivotal in driving educational reform, requiring leaders to grasp key components such as policy implementation, societal influences, and transformative practices within the reform process (Pont et al.). Several new questions emerged, offering potential directions for future research. These questions, along with suggestions for future studies, can significantly contribute to the evolving field of educational leadership and school district reform.

Future research could delve more deeply into how various educational policies, beyond graduation requirements and accountability systems, impact the decisions and strategies of transformational leaders. Understanding the multi-dimensional effects of policies on leadership

decisions could shed light on how policies shape educational landscapes and leadership practices.

An in-depth exploration into the influence of socioeconomic factors on leadership approaches could provide valuable insights. Research could focus on how superintendents in different economic contexts adapt their strategies to cater to the unique challenges posed by students and communities with diverse socioeconomic backgrounds.

A longitudinal study tracking the long-term success of school district turnarounds could provide a comprehensive understanding of the enduring impact of transformational leadership. Exploring the sustained success factors and their evolution over time would be instrumental in shaping effective reform strategies.

Comparative research across different states could provide a broader perspective on the role of policy and context in educational leadership. Understanding how transformational leadership varies in response to state-specific policies and cultural contexts would enhance the understanding of effective leadership practices.

An exploration into stakeholders' perceptions, including parents, teachers, students, and community members could shed light on how leadership strategies resonate with different stakeholders. Investigating effective engagement strategies could help in forming a more inclusive and collaborative educational environment.

Given the rapid integration of technology in education, a study focusing on how transformational leaders adapt to and leverage technology for reform efforts is pertinent. Understanding the role of digital transformation in educational leadership can inform strategies for a tech-enabled educational landscape.

These suggestions for future research encompass a spectrum of dimensions vital for understanding the complexities of educational leadership and school district reform. By exploring the influence of policies, socioeconomic factors, long-term success factors, state-specific contexts, stakeholder perceptions, and technology integration, researchers can advance the field and pave the way for more effective educational reform. These research avenues open exciting prospects for a nuanced understanding of transformational leadership and its impact on struggling school districts.

Conclusion

This study delved into the experiences of four seasoned school superintendents who demonstrated success in leading transformative reform efforts within their respective districts. Through in-depth interviews and comprehensive analyses, the researcher explored the intricate facets of the superintendents' leadership journeys, uncovered key elements that contributed to sustained effectiveness. The study included participation from three male and one female superintendents. However, the data collected were not adequate to support a finding on the effects of gender. A critical factor contributing to the effectiveness of superintendents was their unwavering commitment to transformation and revitalizing their districts. This dedication primarily involved a steadfast focus on student learning through a deep understanding of learning standards and vigilant monitoring of student performance guided by data-driven decision making. The inclusion of data was not limited to academic data but rather attendance, engagement, transiency, poverty rates, and stakeholder involvement, just to name a few. Superintendents in the study also emphasized the importance of fairness and consistency in their implementation and decision-making processes to foster a culture of continuous improvement. Consistency within the organization provided a structure to regularly evaluate systems and

processes that were established and fostered the ability to establish systems when needed. A crucial aspect that emerged was the need to reshape the narrative and enhance communication within the district. Recognizing that during times of school reform, the district's image may be perceived as struggling, transformative leaders must excel in changing this perception effectively.

Long-standing superintendents navigated challenges such as legislative reforms, fiscal stewardship, and evolving educational dynamics, showcasing resilience and strategic prowess. In the study, superintendents adeptly tackled the hurdles of school reform by leveraging the school improvement process. This involved a comprehensive review of all district systems and a collective effort to address organizational challenges. School leaders also acknowledged the significance of their local and national networks, recognizing their role in facilitating success. Simply put, superintendents valued their mutual reliance and the exchange of pertinent information among peers. Initially, superintendents in the study admitted to having limited knowledge of financial stewardship. Unlike in other states, in Ohio, superintendents do not supervise treasurers but are considered equals. They recognized the importance of monitoring finances to ensure resources are allocated effectively for student learning and improvement. Managing grants accompanying school improvement status and their implementation required support and expertise.

Superintendents highlighted the necessity of understanding evolving educational dynamics for success. For instance, staying abreast of constant changes and ratings of the Ohio Report Card was crucial. They emphasized the importance of being up-to-date with changes to effectively communicate district standings to the community and staff, especially as rating components often vary annually. Over time, superintendents developed resilience and strategic

proWess. These traits were honed through activities like creating strategic plans involving the entire school community or developing and implementing academic improvement plans with stakeholder input and monitoring.

The study illuminated the nuanced strategies employed by these leaders, emphasizing the importance of collaborative networks and a deep understanding of dynamic educational systems. The study underscored effective strategies such as tailoring the state improvement model to suit the district's context, gaining a deep understanding of the Ohio school improvement process along with the unique challenges faced by the school district which may hinder improvement such as societal factors including poverty. A pivotal approach involved superintendents staying abreast of legislation and remaining informed about impending changes through attending legislative workshops and obtaining regular legal updates.

Another strategy utilized by superintendents was establishing connections with community leaders to enhance transparency. During periods of reform, it was observed that prioritizing communication within the district was not as crucial as forming partnerships with city leaders such as the mayor, business representatives, and city council members. This proactive approach enabled superintendents to promptly address misconceptions and ensure that the district's narrative remained accurate and clear. Often, this involved retaining a communications firm and rebranding the district through initiatives like regular newsletters, highlighting student and staff achievements, conducting frequent meetings with union groups, and consistently representing the district as the face of the superintendent.

Leadership and management, though often used interchangeably, embody distinct concepts, especially within the context of educational administration and the superintendency. Leadership involves setting a vision, inspiring others to follow, and fostering an environment of

innovation and change. It is more about guiding and influencing people toward achieving common goals. In contrast, management focuses on the execution of this vision, entailing planning, organizing, directing, and controlling resources to achieve specific objectives efficiently and effectively.

The state plays a critical role in both the leadership and management aspects of education, particularly in setting policies, standards, and accountability measures that superintendents must navigate (Marzano et al., 2005). The state's role can significantly influence the superintendent's ability to lead and manage, impacting everything from curriculum standards to funding allocations.

A critical issue within the realm of superintendency is the constant turnover of superintendents, which can destabilize the leadership and management continuity in school districts (Fullan, 2001). The average tenure of a superintendent is relatively short, often cited as less than five years. This turnover can disrupt the implementation of long-term strategies, affect the morale and culture within the district, and lead to a cycle of constant change that hampers sustained improvement efforts.

The life of the superintendency is thus marked by the challenge of balancing effective leadership with efficient management amidst the pressures of external mandates, the expectations of diverse stakeholders, and the realities of educational politics. Superintendents must navigate these complexities while striving to improve educational outcomes, which requires a blend of visionary leadership and pragmatic management to adapt to and influence the ever-changing educational landscape (Grissom et al., 2021).

Resilience, adaptability, and a deep understanding of both educational leadership and management are therefore essential for superintendents to successfully guide their districts

through reforms and challenges, underscoring the multifaceted nature of their role (Björk et al., 2014).

By distilling their collective experiences, this research provides valuable insights for educational leadership, offering a possible blueprint for success that extends beyond individual anecdotes to inform and inspire future reform efforts led by superintendents.

Personal Reflection

In conducting my dissertation, I embarked on a deeply personal journey of exploration. Through intimate interviews with seasoned superintendents appointed to their positions through legislative channels, I delved into their experiences and insights regarding mandated reform efforts. What emerged from these conversations was a poignant narrative of personal struggles and unwavering dedication. Superintendents candidly shared their battles with fatigue and challenges but underscored their relentless commitment to the mission, driven by the imperative to serve students and their communities. Superintendents were able to connect with their family history and how it impacted their decision making today. Amidst the exhaustion and hurdles, their unwavering resolve was anchored in the profound sense of responsibility toward the greater good.

During this study, a remarkable twist of fate unfolded as I unexpectedly assumed the role of superintendent myself. Little did I anticipate that my research journey would seamlessly intersect with my professional trajectory. The firsthand experiences shared by these seasoned leaders not only enriched my understanding but also equipped me with invaluable insights that now shape my leadership approach. Their narratives serve as guiding beacons, reminding me of the significance of resilience, empathy, and community engagement in navigating the complexities of educational leadership. They also echoed the necessity to build networks to

survive the world of superintendency, as it can often feel like an ominously lonely place to be. As I navigate the challenges of my current role, the findings of my dissertation study continue to illuminate my path, serving as a compass to steer toward impactful and transformative leadership practices that prioritize the holistic well-being of students and communities alike.

Final Thoughts

This research study on understanding long-standing, transformational school district leaders in Ohio, appointed through legislation, and their implementation of mandated reform efforts carries substantial significance within the realm of urban school reform. Urban schools, particularly those serving minority populations, have been disproportionately affected by reform efforts due to various socio-economic and systemic factors. The findings offer valuable insights into the specific challenges and opportunities inherent in urban educational contexts by delving into the attributes and strategies of leaders navigating mandated reforms in Ohio. This knowledge is crucial for informing school leaders and districts about the nuanced approaches required for sustainable, long-term reform in urban settings.

Furthermore, the study addresses a critical gap in the literature surrounding urban school reform by focusing on the perspectives and experiences of long-standing, transformational leaders. These leaders play a pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of reform efforts within their districts. Understanding their approaches, successes, and challenges can provide valuable guidance for other leaders grappling with similar issues in urban educational contexts nationwide. By highlighting the leadership attributes conducive to successful reform, the study contributed to the development of evidence-based practices that can be replicated and adapted to meet the diverse needs of urban schools and districts.

Moreover, the study's findings have broader implications for policy and practice in the field of education. By illuminating the factors that contribute to long-term, successful reform efforts in urban districts, the research can inform state-level policies aimed at supporting struggling schools and districts. This insight is particularly relevant as policymakers seek to address disparities in educational outcomes and promote equity in educational opportunities. By leveraging the knowledge generated from this study, policymakers can design more effective strategies and allocate resources in ways that empower school leaders and foster sustainable improvement in urban educational settings, ultimately advancing the goal of educational equity and excellence for all students.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

Dear Superintendent,

My name is Marnisha Brown, and I am a doctoral candidate at Youngstown State University. I am also a current assistant superintendent and secondary school principal in a school district in the state of Ohio. I am working on my dissertation entitled “Transformational School District Leaders: The Characteristics of Long-standing School District Leaders That Have Successfully Navigated Educational Reform Efforts in Ohio.” Your experience as a superintendent is essential to my research. Therefore, I am seeking participants for my qualitative study of the characteristics possessed by long-standing superintendents. As part of my qualitative study, I aim to explore the specific qualities and skills crucial for navigating reform efforts as a superintendent. Your insights on these characteristics and your experiences will be valuable for aspiring school leaders seeking to enter this position. I would like to identify and interview four current superintendents who fulfill the following criteria: 1) a current superintendent in the State of Ohio, 2) a district considered “failing” or in an improvement status as identified by the State of Ohio, and 3) a majority-minority school district. Participation in this study will include the completion of a demographic questionnaire, an interview that will take no longer than 120 minutes, and a follow-up inquiry by phone if needed. The interview process will be conducted online via Zoom and/or in person, with the date and time of the interview determined by you.

Participation is voluntary, confidential, and there will be no personal identifying information about you in the study. Even if you agree to participate, you may withdraw at any time. If you have any questions about my study or would like further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

[Marnisha Brown](#)

xxx@gmail.com

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT

My name is Marnisha Brown, and I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership program at Youngstown State University. I am also a current assistant superintendent and secondary principal in a school district in Ohio. To help complete my dissertation process, I will conduct interviews as part of my research study to understand the leadership journeys of superintendents who have successfully navigated reform efforts.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

- A. This research study is intended to add to the knowledge about the traits and characteristics that successful long-standing transformational leaders possess while engaged in school reform efforts.
- B. To contribute to new and existing knowledge about the experiences of successful transformational school district leaders and their ability to navigate legislative measures and to provide valuable information for future leaders that lead within the same context.

RESEARCH STUDY DESIGN AND DURATION

This research study will utilize a biographical narrative design encompassing the following parts:

- A. Semi-structured interviews – No more than a 120-minute interview following a set of scripted interview questions that align with literature-based themes about the traits and characteristics of transformational school leaders involved in school reform efforts. The online system Zoom will be used to conduct the interviews. Responses will be recorded digitally and also with handwritten notes.
- B. Demographic Questionnaire – (5 minutes)
- C. Analysis of Interview – Analysis of your interview will be emailed to you for your review, verification, and comments (20 minutes).
- D. Follow-up Inquiry – Reflect on the experience and other inquiries (10 minutes).

POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND RISKS FROM PARTICIPATION IN THE STUDY

As a participant in this study, several benefits exist. A benefit of reflection on your experiences may give you a greater understanding of successful leadership characteristics, lessons learned, and the implication of legislative reform efforts. In addition, this study may provide valuable information on the strategies school district leaders use to navigate reform efforts in Ohio successfully. The possible risk, harm, discomfort, or inconvenience to you from participating in this study is minimal. Although the researcher will take every precaution to protect your confidentiality, your responses may identify you, leading to various risks, including adverse social and employment consequences. As such, please only share information you feel comfortable sharing.

STATEMENT OF DATA CONFIDENTIALITY

As a participant in this study, you will not be identified by name in any reports or publications. Your confidentiality and anonymity will be ensured during this study, and all data gathered will be subject to standard data use policies which protect your privacy and personal information. Only the researcher will have access to the personal data collected during this study. Each participant will be assigned a pseudonym. Using a pseudonym as part of maintaining confidentiality ensures the protection of the participants privacy and sensitive information. By assigning a pseudonym or a fictitious name to participants, their true identities will remain concealed, reducing the risk of unauthorized disclosure.

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY AT ANY TIME WITHOUT PENALTY

If you feel uncomfortable at any point in the research study, you have the right to refuse to answer any question and may also end the interview immediately upon request.

QUESTIONS

The researcher will offer to answer any questions before and during the research study. No deception will be used in the research study.

CONTACT INFORMATION

I have read all the above information about the research study and my rights as a research participant. I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study and have been given a copy of this form.

My Printed Name: _____

My Signature: _____

Date: _____

I have read all the above information about the research study, including the study design and the data collection method. I voluntarily agree to be recorded during the interview process.

My Printed Name: _____

My Signature: _____

Date: _____

AGE DECLARATION

I agree that I am at least 18 years of age and therefore do not require permission from a parent or legal guardian to participate in this study.

My Printed Name: _____

My Signature: _____

Date: _____

Signature of the Researcher: _____

Marnisha Brown (Researcher)- Youngstown State University

xxx-xxx-xxxx

xxx@gmail.com

Dr. Jane Beese (Dissertation Chair)- Youngstown State University

xxx-xxx-xxxx

xxx@ysu.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Office of Research at YSU (330-941-2377) or at YSUIRB@ysu.edu

APPENDIX C

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Choose the pseudonym you prefer to be referred to throughout this study:
2. Number of years in the field of K-12 education:
3. Highest degree obtained:
4. Teaching area/s:
5. Number of years in an administrative position:
6. Please list administrative position:
7. Number of years as a school superintendent:
8. Number of years in current superintendent position:
9. Current size of school district by enrollment:
10. What category best describes your school district?
11. Age range:
12. Marital status:
13. Do you have children?
14. What is your race/ethnicity?
15. (OPTIONAL)In regards to gender, how do you identify?
16. Add anything else you would like to share:

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL PREVIEW

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me and to share your experiences related to your journey in navigating school reform as a superintendent. My name is Marnisha Brown, and I am a doctoral candidate at Youngstown State University. I am also a current assistant superintendent and secondary school principal in a school district in the state of Ohio. Your experience as a superintendent navigating school reform is important to my research. I aim to explore the specific qualities and skills crucial for navigating reform efforts as a superintendent. Your insights on these characteristics and experiences will be valuable for aspiring school leaders seeking to enter this position. I will be asking a variety of questions during the interview. Please know that if you feel uncomfortable answering any of the questions, feel free to pass on any questions or stop the interview at any point. The interview will take at most 120 minutes of your time. Below is a preview of the questions to be asked during the interview process.

1. Please tell me about your decision to become a public school superintendent. What made you decide to lead a ‘failing school district?’
2. Understanding the school improvement process is vital to enacting school improvement in Ohio. What barriers affected your ability to make positive change and academic growth?
3. Superintendents are required to be competent in education legislation policy to be effective in reform efforts. As you reflect on the interview process for your selection with your district, do any specific instances or questions related to school legislative policy come to mind?

4. With the superintendent turnover rate in Ohio ranging from 14-16%, it is clear that the job is demanding. What factors influenced your decision to take this challenging job?
5. We know from the literature that being involved in collaborative networks is an essential asset for someone leading school change. What networks have assisted you in your career?
6. What, if anything, did you find most challenging about being a superintendent under the auspices of school improvement?
7. School board and community relations are the responsibility of the superintendent to create and maintain. What strategies did you use to coalesce your board, community, and other stakeholders?
8. What specific skills and traits do you believe are needed for a transformational school leader who is actively involved in reform efforts to be successful?
9. The Ohio Department of Education has had many iterations of how they rank and identify the performance of school districts. According to Ohio's Department of Education's current report card system, how are schools identified as low-performing or failing? How does it compare to past versions?
10. What leadership practices do successful leaders in schools/districts identified as failing use to advance from the 'failing' designation?
11. Some people say that there is no such thing as a transformational leader in schools because the system is too rigidly dictated by laws and policy. What would you say to those people?

12. Schools are ranked and placed into categories in Ohio according to their academic performance and other factors. What category was your school or district ranked, and according to what data point(s)?

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

[Marnisha Brown](#)

Marnisha Brown

APPENDIX E

THANK YOU EMAIL TO PARTICIPANTS

(to be sent within 24 hours after the interview)

Dear _____,

Thank you for sharing your experiences with me on _____. I appreciate you taking the time to do so. If you have any additional thoughts, ideas, or reflections since we conducted the interview, please do not hesitate to contact me. You may respond to this email or call me, whichever you prefer. My email address is xx@gmail.com, and my phone number is xxx-xxx-xxxx.

Thank you,

Marnisha Brown

APPENDIX F

IRB LETTER OF PERMISSION



**YOUNGSTOWN
STATE
UNIVERSITY**

December 27, 2023

Jane Beese
Teacher Ed and Leadership St

Re: Exempt - Initial - 2023-274 Transformational School District Leaders: The Characteristics of Long-standing School District Leaders That Have Successfully Navigated Educational Reform Efforts in Ohio

Dear Dr. Jane Beese:

Youngstown State University Human Subjects Review Board has rendered the decision below for Transformational School District Leaders: The Characteristics of Long-standing School District Leaders That Have Successfully Navigated Educational Reform Efforts in Ohio

Decision: Exempt

Selected Category: Category 2.(ii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or

Any changes in your research activity should be promptly reported to the Institutional Review Board and may not be initiated without IRB approval except where necessary to eliminate hazard to human subjects. Any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects should also be promptly reported to the IRB.

The IRB would like to extend its best wishes to you in the conduct of this study.

Sincerely,
Youngstown State University Human Subjects Review Board