

**FIVE AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE SUPERINTENDENTS AND THEIR  
LEADERSHIP IN DIVERSE SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN TEXAS**

A Dissertation

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

The focus of this research is in the area of African American male superintendents and their leadership in diverse settings. The research approach adopted in this dissertation used semi-structured interviews with five African American male superintendents that consisted of three main issues: (1) personal; (2) leadership quality/effectiveness and (3) impact on student academic performance. The findings from this research provide evidence that: superintendents believed they gained their focus on education by having strong parental influences; each superintendent believed that their involvement in sports helped them to sharpen their leadership skills at an early age; they believed in having systems in place to monitor and track the performance of their district; being visible in the community has helped to garner support from all stakeholders; and being educated during the civil rights era taught the superintendents a lot about equity issues. The main conclusions drawn from this research were that superintendent efficacy, professional development and a goal toward academic success for all students were the components demonstrated by these district leaders. This research recommends that superintendents have professional development to strengthen strong people skills, create mentorships and shadow-mentoring programs for both African American male superintendent candidates and practicing African American male superintendents new to the job or new to their district, emphasize diversity in leadership, investigate superintendency preparation programs at the university level to address racial issues, and research studies should be more specific on the office of the superintendency.

## **DEDICATION**

“I will lift up my eyes to the hills-where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth” (Psalms 121:1-2).”

This dissertation is dedicated in the memory of my mother, the late Verdelle Smothers; my father, the late Felton Smothers; my grandmother, the late Iceola Smothers; and my brother, the late Corinth Smothers.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my gorgeous wife and best friend: Avis. You are my partner in love and my soul's truest mate. You have shared dreams with me and you are always by my side. Having you by my side has made everything in this life seem right. I know that I have been in school for a period of time and it seems like it has been forever, but now I'm done! Thank you for standing by me, supporting me, encouraging me, pushing me, and praying for me along this journey. I LOVE YOU!

To my daughter: Genesis. You are the beginning of a new generation in our family- the first born. It has been a pleasure watching you grow over the years. This is the last degree that Daddy has to earn. Of course, I never let my schooling interfere with spending time with my "baby girl." It is over now. This means that I can focus more on all of those little boys who want to smile in your face as you matriculate through middle school and on to high school!

To my son: Joshua. Since my parents gave my brother and me biblical names, I guess it was a good idea to keep up the tradition with you and your sister. From my biblical readings, Joshua had a great mentor by the name of Moses. That is the relationship that I so deeply share with you; I am *your* Moses. I will not be with you always, but I must leave behind a legacy in your heart and soul that will lead you to take the path least followed. I will show you the direction of the promised land.

To my in-laws Jimmie and Joyce Caldwell: I thank you for your undying, unwavering support that you have always given me from the very first time we met. You

have always been by my side in whatever challenge I took on in life. Thank you for being there.

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I am especially grateful to the five superintendents who agreed to participate in this study. These men have provided me with a wealth of information about the lived experiences of African American superintendents and their leadership in diverse school districts.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Public education in America is constantly shifting and evolving. School administrators have taken an active role with a steady hand in navigating this sea of change. The challenges and crises evident in a number of school districts throughout America validate the need for innovative school leadership that only an effective superintendent can provide. Admittedly, the superintendency is one of the most demanding, challenging, and influential school leadership positions in America (Council of Great City Schools, 2010). Nevertheless, the demands of such a position clearly should not preclude one's commitment to excellence and productivity, nor should these demands and challenges serve as excuses for unwarranted crises and challenges. As America's public education is changing, so has the superintendency. The superintendency has become more diverse and representative of the schools they lead (Kowalski, et al 2011). This diversity has brought about the responsibility of student achievement while juggling the diversification of the student and staff population, the explosion of technological advances and the digital divide, a broader set of expectations, involvement from the federal and state level, school board, and community relations. All of this diversity is under the umbrella of an increasingly globalized educational system.

Using a discursive analysis that relied heavily on rhetoric and writings from 1865 to 1965 (Brunner, Grogan, & Bjork, 2002), historian Raymond Callahan (1962; 1966) concluded that four separate role conceptualizations of the school district superintendent

had become prominent; teacher-scholar, business manager, statesman, and applied social scientist. By the early 2000's Kowalski (2001, 2005, 2006) felt that the following role should be added to the previous four conceptualizations: the school district superintendent as effective communicator.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The way one conducts himself/herself throughout his/her life is influenced by leadership and leadership persona. A person's individual goals, values, and beliefs reveal his/her leadership and his/her leadership persona. Marcia (1993) states that development takes place in four stages: 1) identity foreclosure; 2) identity achievement; 3) identity diffusion; and 4) moratorium. Identity foreclosure is impacted by childhood expectations placed on a child by his/her parents. A person's identity is not fully shaped at this time because the person does not know anything other than that which has been taught to him/her by his/her parents. The identity achievement stage involves exploring other ways of becoming knowledgeable and those who initiated their own paths in life. Identity diffusion, the third stage, is characterized by the constant changing of a person's behavior pattern changing constantly from day to day. This stage may be viewed as being dysfunctional because a person seems to refuse to form an identity. Finally, moratorium seeks new ways of doing things. Even though this stage may seem indecisive on the part of the individual, fluctuation between identity achievement and moratorium is considered normal as a person makes progress toward securing his/her identity.

Keagan (1982) proposed that his stages of identity formation dealt with the struggle between being part of and being separate from (object-relatedness). Therefore, a person's individualism occurred during the change between the past and the present, and a force was felt as one moved onward in his/her path of becoming. Marcia (1993), by the same token, distinguished identity formation from the construction of identity. He proclaimed that identity is formed when people are able to make important decisions about their lives, such as values, goals, beliefs, relationships, and occupations.

In spite of what research has written on leader persona and personal identity, the achievement of an individual or organization has been attributed to the type of leadership it practices. Many businesses and educational institutions have used formulas, strategies, and different approaches in an effort to increase effective leadership. On the other hand, Curry (2000) proposed that effective leaders are not found in formulas or strategies, but instead are connected within an individual's development of becoming. The leadership persona, involving an individual's personal histories and inter-subjective experiences, should be taken into account when determining the way one leads. Consequently, effective, successful leadership may be due to the compatibility between an organization and a leader. However, institutions continue to ignore personal histories while trying to apply both theoretical and practical strategies aimed at leadership development in educational settings as a means for reaching high levels of professional and academic successes.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) was born in the mid -1970's when an assemblage of lawyers, activists and legal scholars realized that the Civil Rights movement could no

longer move toward equality without new theories and strategies to battle other forms of racism. According to some scholars (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw, 1995; Delgado, 1995), critical race theory began as a movement in law. CRT is a product of a prior movement called Critical Legal Studies (CLS). This movement is a legal study that was started by a legal movement that challenged the concept that “the civil rights struggle represents a long, steady march toward social transformation (Crenshaw, 1988, p. 1334).”

Delgado & Stefanie (2001, p. 17) define racism as “ a means by which society allocates privilege and status [and] racial hierarchies determine who gets tangible benefits, including best jobs, the best schools, and invitations to parties in people’s homes.” Therefore, racism can be also known as the unseen rules of culture.

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), Tate (1997), Soloranzo and Villalpando (1998), and Parker, Deyhle, and Villenas (1999) applied socio-political CRT to an understanding of the background of education. Likewise, Parker (2001) used CRT to examine how “educational policies and practices in areas such as graduate education, school funding, curriculum and instruction, and bilingual education have had a negative racial impact on African Americans” (p. 38). Ladson-Billings stressed that because of the association between law and education it is not outlined explicitly in the United States Constitution, the alignment of law and education is one of the social functions regulated to individual states.

CRT is grounded in the realities of lived experiences. Researchers (Bell, 1995; Delgado, 1995; Jackson, 2002) argue that telling appropriately used stories and counter stories (particularly the stories of African Americans) is an effective and commanding

way to combat a belief system that perpetuates negative stereotypes and feelings about African Americans. Delgado (1995) also asserts that there are four reasons to incorporate stories or voices in telling the stories and experiences of people of color: reality is socially constructed, stories are a powerful means for destroying and changing mind-sets, stories have a community-building purpose and stories provide members of out-groups mental self-preservation. Solorzano and Yosso (2002; Fernandez, 2002) used the concept of story-telling in educational research as a means of validating the lived experiences of African Americans. According to Delgado and Stefanic (2001), counter-storytelling invites you to understand the perspectives and experiences of others, thereby recognizing the voice of marginalized groups and not positioning them as other. Historically speaking, story telling has been utilized as a remedy to heal the pain caused by racial oppression. The shared experiences of African Americans, such as those stories of African American male superintendents, who have had difficulty in obtaining a position as a school superintendent can be helpful to those who are seeking to follow in their foot steps.

Adding credence to this view, Delpit (1995) argued that one of the tragedies in the field of education is the way in which the voices of African Americans have been silenced. Their voices have been silenced due to the fact that there is such a small representation of African American males in the superintendency. Even though the number of African American superintendents will be less than their European American counterparts, researchers predict there will be an increase of African American superintendents. This increase will be precipitated by the decision of European

American superintendents not to accept positions in urban school districts. The perception that there are insurmountable problems in these schools will trigger this refusal (Moody, 1971; Scott, 1980).

### **Personal Story**

At the start of my teaching career while working as an African American male teacher at a city school in a low-income area, I soon realized the positive impact I could have on young, impressionable African American males. I had finally realized that I could now be to other young African American males what my father had been to me all of my life – the ultimate role model. As I sat down at the desk of my first teaching assignment, I quietly reflected on my father’s 34 years of being in the classroom. I remember his telling me how rewarding his teaching career had been to him and how my brother and I had benefitted from it. He would call to my attention that it was because of a student that each brick was used to help build our house. His daily attire consisted of wearing ties to school when it was not part of the dress code. He wanted to lead by example and show what hard work and being successful looked like; but not in a boastful way. I never asked my father why he did not move into an administrative role, but evidently he was happy with the position he held.

Consequently, as an African American male, I am trying to represent the change I want today’s observant, young, African American male to see. I want them to look at me in the same way I looked at my dad. It is my belief that I can start the change, but in order to be more effective I will have to move out of the classroom into a higher administrative position. In order for me to make that step and be successful at it, I need



to speak with someone who has been where I am trying to go-to the office of superintendent. Hopefully, this study will allow the voices of the superintendents that I interview, to be heard. This study will seek to move beyond the surface of observation and inform other aspiring superintendents about the challenges of becoming an African American male superintendent and have success in diverse school districts.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In the field of administration, superintendency has been the central focus of research with most studies focusing on the experiences of European Americans males (Shakeshaft, 1989). Research has expanded its literature on defining leadership and examining character traits and qualities associated with the superintendent (CGCS, 2010). Considering the increased diversity which exists in schools today, it is imperative to visualize the superintendency in more expansive ways, particularly through the voices of African American male superintendents. It is important for men to verbalize personal insight about their character, which will enable them to think about their inner values, beliefs, and leadership styles (Wesson, 1998). There is a need for research to provide insight on the personal and professional characteristics and attributes of male superintendents in diverse school districts. Therefore, this study will attempt to fill the void by including the voices and lived stories and experiences of five African American male superintendents who can inform others about important issues of leadership in diverse school districts.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to hear voices and the life experiences of leadership practices for five African American male superintendents in diverse school districts. The goal is to use discourse to determine the constructed meanings of their personal and professional acts of leading as it relates to diverse school districts.

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study is to provide insights to educators about African American superintendents in diverse settings. African American male educators who wish to become superintendents can use this research to gain insight from existing African American superintendents of diverse school districts. Aspiring and incumbent African American superintendents can also learn from this study by reflecting upon their own experiences.

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to examine and (re) interpret (Dillard, 1995) the life experiences and leadership practices of five African American male superintendents in diverse school districts. The following questions will serve as guides for the study:

1. How do African American male superintendents describe their personal characteristics related to success in their diverse school district?
2. How do the selected African American male superintendents exercise and interpret their acts of leadership?

3. What are these African American male superintendents' perceptions about leadership related to student academic achievement in their diverse school district?

### **Definitions of Terms**

***African American or Black*** – An African American is a member of an ethnic group in the United States whose ancestors, usually in predominant part, were indigenous to Africa. The majority of African Americans are the descendents of enslaved Africans transported via slave ships following the sea route known as the Middle passage from West and Central Africa to North America and the Caribbean from 1565 through 1807 during the trans-Atlantic slave trade (Wikipedia Encyclopedia, 2012).

***Diverse School District:*** According to the United States Department of the Interior's Office of Civil Rights, the term diversity is used broadly to refer to many demographic variables, including, but not limited to, race, religion, color, gender, national origin, disability, sexual orientation, age, education, geographic origin, and skill characteristics. For the purpose of this study, it includes districts that have racial or ethnic minorities (40%), limited English proficiency (11%), and low socioeconomic status (61%) associated with low student achievement and high school-dropout rates (11%).

***Leadership Styles:*** Leadership styles can include transformational, visionary, facilitative, instructional, and community. All are valued, but for this study, leadership for student learning and achievement is the priority that connects and encompasses all leadership styles (Hallinger & Heck, 1998).

**Majority:** This portion of the population consists of members that make-up over half of the population. It is a group having power or representation relative to other groups within society. It may also be considered an advantaged racial or ethnic group. For the purpose of this study, European American Americans have been considered majority.

**People of Color:** A member of a disadvantaged racial and ethnic group. For the purpose of this dissertation, Native Americans, Hispanics, and African Americans have been labeled as minorities (Valverde & Brown, 1988).

**Principal:** Administrator in charge of individual schools (Thomas B. Fordham, 2003).

**Race/Ethnicity:** The concept of race used by the Census Bureau includes self-identification with five minimum categories: European Americans, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander. People who may identify their origin as Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish may be of any race.

**School Board:** Local boards of education are created by state statutes for the purposes of administering local school districts. They are legally the governing body for the school district; they can act only as a body; individually, members have no power; primary responsibilities are goal setting and policy making. The boards derive their powers from the state constitution, statutes, and court decisions (Kritsonis, 2002).

**School District** – A geographical area, that is generally connected with a legally established municipality, where the student population may be high in number, and which has been designated as a local school unit, often by state authority, to be governed

by a local School Board in terms of power and duties delegated by the state (Good, 1973).

***Superintendent*** – The chief executive officer of a public school district, who is charged under the Board of Education, with all the aspects of a school district's day to day operations which center on providing instructional, organizational, and community-wide leadership to the school district (Clisbee, 2004).

***Voices*** – Framework of in depth expressions of one's way of knowing. Voices include life experiences (personal and professional experiences) which may be expression of one's values, beliefs, needs, and concerns.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

#### **Introduction**

Before the milestone case of Brown versus the Board of Education era, research on African American superintendents was practically nonexistent, and not until the 1970s that African Americans serving in the role of the superintendency came into view as a particular line of inquiry (Taylor & Tillman, 2009). Throughout American history, African Americans have struggled both to be taught and to be employed in the field of education. Today, whether they are teaching in classrooms or serving as the chief executive officer of a school system, the fight to gain equality and representation in America's school districts is still a major concern (Gregory, 2006). According to Tillman (2004) the research on African American superintendents is usually grouped in the category of "women and minorities," and any specific information on the numbers of African American superintendents, as well as their roles and responsibilities before the 1970's is vague. Further, Tillman recognized that as the African American student population and other minorities increased in school districts, so did the demand for African American school superintendents.

Therefore, while research and studies on African Americans in the superintendency is not as extensive as that about African American teachers and principals, we do know that African American superintendents have been in the forefront of the great effort to educate African American children (Jackson, 1995, 1999; Simmons, 2005; Tillman, 2004).

## **Historical Context**

Historically, the conceptualization of superintendent as a teacher-scholar was dominant from 1865-1910. The intent was to “have a person work full time supervising classroom instruction and assuring uniformity of curriculum” (Spring, 1990, p. 141). During this time, persons selected to this position were considered to be effective male teachers. They functioned as lead educators that were subordinate to the board members but were superior to principals, teachers, and pupils (Kowalski, 2006). Many small school boards during this time were reluctant to hire superintendents for fear of losing political power in the community. Superintendents in large city districts were often viewed as scholars because they wrote articles in professional journals on topics such as philosophy, history, and pedagogy (Cuban, 1988). Men of this stature went on to become state superintendents, professors, and college presidents (Petersen & Barnett, 2005). In an 1890 report on superintendents, the superintendent as teacher-scholar was summarized by the following characterization: “It must be made his recognized duty to train teachers and inspire them with high ideals; to revise the course of study when new light shows that improvement is possible; to see that pupils and teachers are supplied with needed appliances for the best possible work; to devise rational methods of promoting pupils” (Cuban, 1976, p.16).

The superintendent as business manager emerged after 1910. Some school boards placed more emphasis on a superintendent’s managerial skills than they did on his or her teaching skills. Prior to this time there were neither courses nor academic degrees offered in educational administration (Cubberley, 1924). After that time, a few courses

were created at Teachers College, Columbia University, and professors seized the opportunity to develop a specialization that was separate from and superior to teaching (Callahan, 1962). The fact that the superintendent was considered a business manager produced what has been described as being authoritative, impersonal, and having a task-oriented set of values and beliefs.

The role of the superintendent as statesman was anchored in the concept of democratic administration. Ernest Melby (1955) argued that the community was public education's greatest resource. He urged administrators to "release the creative capacities of individuals" and "mobilize the educational resources of communities." As a statesman, the superintendent was expected to garner support for education (Howlett, 1993), which meant that this responsibility had political implications. After World War II, the Great Depression, and the stock market crash, new ideas about school governance and administration emerged. Out of these events in history, the democratic localism became extinct and the rise of the concept of representative democracy was born. The democratic localism allowed citizens to actively engage in debate and influence policy based on individual rights, but since population growth and school consolidation were evident at this time; most citizens neither had the time nor expertise to engage in policy making. Therefore, a form of democracy in which citizens allow others to represent them came into existence known as a representative democracy.

Post World War II brought about demographic changes, an increase in school age children, and the creation of new school districts in newly established suburbs. Superintendents who possessed "a greater sensitivity to large social problems through an



interdisciplinary approach involving most of the social sciences (Kellogg Foundation, 1961, p.13)” were highly sought after to fill job vacancies. As an applied social scientist, the superintendents were expected to solve education problems endemic in a multicultural, democratic society (Sergiovanni, Burlingame, Coombs, & Boyd, 1999) by relying on empiricism, predictability, and scientific certainty (Cooper & Boyd, 1987). Institutions of higher learning in the 1960s and 1970s began to require doctoral students in educational administration to complete a cognate in one of the behavioral sciences such as psychology, economics, political science or sociology (Kowalski, 2009).

Throughout history, schools have been considered closed environments. This type of environment encouraged teachers and administrators to work individually and in seclusion (Gideon, 2002). When the classical communication model of “top-down management” was used, it brought about negative effects on employee commitment, job satisfaction, and overall organizational effectiveness. Poor communication was also thought of as a deciding factor in determining perceptions of administrator effectiveness (Richmond, McCroskey, Davis, & Koontz, 1980; Snavely & Walters, 1983). Today, administrators are now expected to initiate as well as facilitate school improvement plans by communicating and collaborating with school employees, students, parents, and other stakeholders in the community (Bjork, 2001; Murphy, 1994).

### **Significant Research Studies**

Research studies have been completed on the school superintendent throughout the last century. *The American School Superintendent: 2010 Decennial Study* (Kowalski, et al, 2011) is an extension of research that has been conducted every 10

years that started in 1923. Most of the earlier studies were sponsored and conducted by the Department of Superintendence, which was a division of the National Education Association (NEA). The purpose of these studies were to assemble demographic profiles, opinions on key educational issues, and what constituted “best practices” in the superintendency (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000). The 1952 and 1960 studies were published in cooperation with the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) and the research division of the NEA. After 1971 and continuing to the most recent study, the sole sponsor has been the AASA. Table 1 contains a list of all the decade studies, including the current study. Even though the content, from study to study is different, all of the research studies define the position, described the person in the position, and analyzed the roles assumed by the position of superintendent.

However, there were issues that were the focal point of certain time periods such as the 1933 study that included the role that public schools would have in revitalizing economic and social growth after the great depression. The 1952 study addressed the differences between urban and rural superintendents. The 1960 study focused on superintendent preparation and the 1971 study included approximately one hundred questions about characteristics of the position, the persons in the position, and the school districts employing them. This format has continued in all studies that followed.

Despite the fact that public high school enrollments have increased, many students attend a small portion of the school districts in the nation. Moreover, the fact that most superintendents work in smaller school districts underscores the importance of district size to the superintendency. Since only a few superintendents serve the largest

urban-based districts, false impressions and generalizations of the superintendency have been created by the media. For example, the myth exists that all superintendents turn over every three years. Of course, this is true for some large urban districts but not true for the average district (Glass & Franceschini, 2007).

**Table 1: Decade Studies of the Superintendency**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Authors</i>
1923	The Status of the Superintendent in 1923	Charles E. Chadsey
1933	Educational Leadership	Not listed
1952	The American School Superintendency (30 <sup>th</sup> yearbook)	Not listed
1960	Profile of the School Superintendent	Not listed
1971	The American School Superintendent	Stephen J. Knezevich
1982	The American School Superintendent	Luvern L. Cunningham & Joseph Hentges
1992	The Study of the American School Superintendency	Thomas Glass
2000	The Study of the American School Superintendency	Thomas Glass, Lars Bjork, & C. Cryss Brunner
2010	The American School Superintendent: 2010 Decennial Study	Theodore Kowalski, Robert McCord, George Petersen, I. Phillip Young, & Noelle Ellerson

Traditionally, African Americans have comprised a liberal portion of persons of color in the superintendency. Prior to 1954, most of them were employed in rural, racial segregated school systems, predominately in the south. After the U.S. Supreme Court found the concept of separate but equal public schools to be unconstitutional, their

numbers dropped considerably (Collier, 1987). But even before this time, Kowalski (2006, p. 231) stated the superintendency had been “shamefully small.”

According to the most recent report conducted by the National Alliance of Black School Educators (NABSE, 2011) there are approximately 13,893 school districts in the United States. Nevertheless, only 361 or 2.5% are African American and NABSE superintendents. Additionally, 70% of the 361 or 253 are African American males. A breakdown of superintendents by race shows that European Americans held the majority of superintendencies in our nation in 2010 (Kowalski, et al, 2011). The 2010 study highlighted the number and percentage of superintendents that responded to a survey of superintendents based on categories designated in the United States Census (see Table 2). The majority of the positions of superintendent are being held by European Americans. Looking at these figures clearly indicate that the ethnicity of the superintendency looks nothing like that of the population of students and teachers those superintendents serve and supervise which will, by the year 2020, make up 38% racial and ethnic minorities (Volp, 2001).

### **Historical Perspectives on African American Superintendents**

There has been limited research on the subject of African American males in school superintendency. Due to the lack of literature in this area, it is not easy to follow the career paths of African Americans who have attained superintendent positions from a historical perspective. It is believed that the first African American superintendents were appointed in 1956 (Jones, 1983). Lillard Ashley of Boley, Oklahoma (1956), Arthur Shropshire of Kinloch, Missouri (1963), E.W. Warrior of Taft, Oklahoma (1958)

**Table 2: Superintendent Profile: Race/Ethnicity**

<b>RACE</b>	<b>NUMBER</b>	<b>%</b>
Black	36	2.0
European Americans	1692	94.0
Hispanic	36	2.0
American Indian or Alaska Native	27	1.5
Asian	5	0.3
Other	4	0.2
Total	1800	100

Source: The 2010 Study of the American School Superintendency (p. 20)

and Lorenzo R. Smith of Hopkins Park, Illinois (1956) are considered by the National Alliance of Black School Educators (NABSE, 1999) as being those who carved a path in history as being among the first African American superintendents.

It was not until the 1970's that African American superintendents were appointed to urban school districts in any number. Usually, the African Americans superintendents in urban districts were viewed by many constituents as representing their entire race and high expectations were placed on them (Jackson, 1995). These African American superintendents were typically appointed to urban school districts in which problems had become so severe that solutions were limited. In addition, the African American superintendents are most often appointed to school districts with both inadequate financial resources and well-developed reservoirs of unmet needs (Scott, 1980). Their systems have large concentrations of African American students along with those from disadvantaged socioeconomic environmental settings. The schools suffer from declining

achievement test scores and their communities frequently display large-scale unrest about the schools (Moody, 1983).

The earliest and most significant literature is found in the pioneer work of Dr. Charles Moody, a leading authority on the topic who conducted the first study of African American superintendents. He analyzed twenty one public school systems in the United States. While earning his doctorate at Northwestern University, Charles D. Moody, completed his dissertation study entitled: *Black Superintendents in Public School Districts: Trends and Conditions*. This was the first such study in the United States. In order for African American superintendents to be selected, he felt that the school district had to have a majority African American board of education, a majority non-European Americans student population, and a majority non-European Americans community population. He received a grant from the Metropolitan Applied Research Corporation (MARC) Foundation to fund his research. Dr. Moody said, “When one is in a struggle or battle, he looks around to see if he is alone. This human characteristic was one of the underlying factors in the formation of the National Alliance of Black School Superintendents.” The National Alliance of Black School Superintendents changed its name to the National Alliance of Black School Educators, to include school administrators and teachers.

### **African American Males Leaders in Education**

The Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS) is a coalition of 65 of the nation’s largest urban school systems (See Appendix D). The mission of the Council is to advocate for urban public schools and to assist them in their improvement. To meet

that mission, the Council provides services to its members in the areas of legislation, research, communications, curriculum and instruction, and management. CGCS includes some of the nation's largest urban school districts. There are approximately 17,000 school districts in the country, the districts that comprise the Council serve approximately 7.2 million of America's 48.7 million K-12 students, and approximately one-third of the nation's low-income students, students of color, and English language learners. With these numbers urban school superintendents face a greater set of challenges than their counterparts throughout the rest of the nation.

To determine the characteristics of school superintendents for the 2009-2010 school year, member districts were surveyed. The surveys were sent out in May 2010 with reminders by email and phone to ensure the highest response rate possible. The respondents were asked to provide information on gender, race/ethnicity, salary, benefits, bonuses, and previous work experience of their districts superintendent. Surveys were received from 56 of the 65 CGCS member districts (86 %). The data from the survey done by this report has limitations such as no tests of statistical significance or standard errors of measurement. The data from this report were made solely on the information reported by the districts. Below is a list of highlights that were gathered from the demographic data: (a) As of 2010, approximately 47 % of superintendents from CGCS member districts identified themselves as European Americans, 41 % as Black, and 11 % as Hispanic. These percentages appear to be similar to those in 1999, when 42 % of CGCS superintendents identified themselves as European Americans, 43 % as Black, and 15 % as Hispanic. (Figure 1), (b) As of 2010, approximately 74 % of CGCS

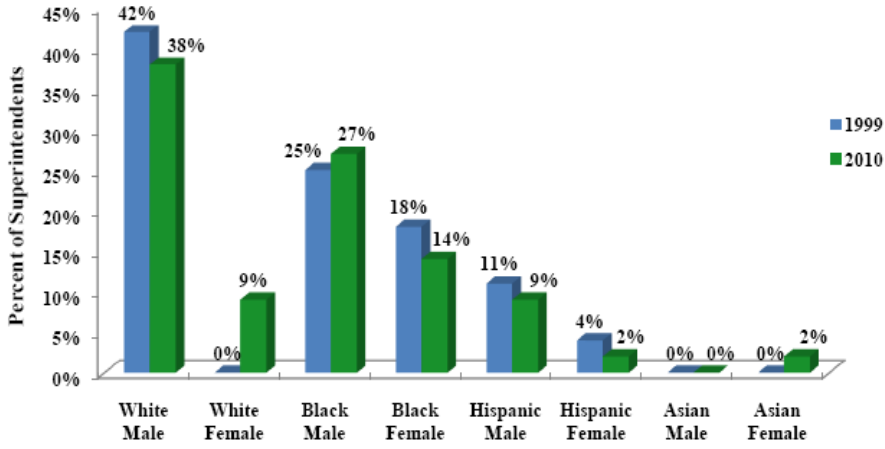
superintendents were men. Thirty-eight % of CGCS superintendents were European Americans males, 27 % were Black males, and 9 % were Hispanic males. (Figure 1 and 2)

### **Personal Characteristics of Successful Superintendents**

“Visionary.” “Integrity.” “Academic excellence.” “Bridge builder.” “Understanding of different cultures.” These were just some of the personal characteristics that Vargo (2005) stated were essential in having in order to become a successful superintendent. The search for an exceptional superintendent often begins with a definition. The field of leadership and leadership development identifies clear characteristics of outstanding leaders. Here are some of the qualities that refer to a superintendent’s personal and professional behaviors that help to characterize outstanding leaders: (1) having ambition for the organizations they lead, not for themselves; possessing a sense of personal humility; giving credit to others in times of success, taking responsibility in times of failure; relying on inspired standards more than personal charisma to motivate employees (Vargo, 2005), (2) exemplifying the ability to work effectively as a team player, (3) organizing people and resources to successfully pursue and accomplish goals, (4) showing commitment to and the pursuit of a compelling vision, (5) helping to mentor future leaders to empower the organization as a whole and to sustain its strengths over time, (6) steadfast resolve to ensure that the organization performs at the highest level of achievement., (7) demonstrating competence in dealing with situations that involve self-awareness, self-management,

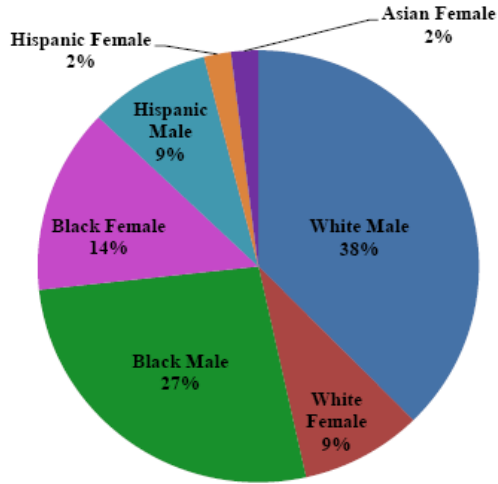


**Figure 1. Race/Ethnicity and Gender of CGCS Superintendents:  
1999 and 2010**



Graph printed with permission from Council of Great City Schools, Urban Indicator, Fall 2010.

**Figure 2. Race/Ethnicity and Gender of CGCS Superintendents in  
2010\***



\*Calculations may not sum to 100 due to rounding

Graph printed with permission from Council of Great City Schools, Urban Indicator, Fall 2010.

social awareness, and relationship management, (8) utilizing various management styles in appropriate situation to promote the organization's performance, and (9) exhibiting unimpeachable moral character. (See Appendix E).

### **Effective Educational Leadership**

“Effective superintendents,” according to Mike Kirst (1993), have a mental picture of what good instruction is and know how to execute programs that will improve teaching and learning. “It’s not about getting a bond issue passed. It’s about improving classroom instruction.” In view of Kirst’s observations, most of the studies on the role of the superintendent offer unclear suggestions of effective leadership characteristics. Furthermore, leadership styles are not linked to district or student performance.

It should be noted, however, that effective educational leadership can come in all shapes and sizes, ages, and dispositions. On the other hand, some studies of leadership have turned to the physical attributes that help to characterize an effective leader such as height, weight, eye color, and overall attractiveness. All of these have been closely examined, and none have been found to significantly differentiate leaders from non leaders. However, significant differences are found when one stares at two particular physical characteristics of educational leaders: gender and race.

If we sit back and reminisce about our “school days,” two images of our school officials would definitely come to mind. The favorite teacher, in most cases, was a woman. The principal, the feared and revered final authority, particularly in high school, is likely to have been a man. Now that the gender issue has been noted, perhaps our attention should shift to race. At this point, images of the European American, male

school administrator begin to surface. As a result of this, we get a societal view that African American males may not be capable of being administrators.

Today, the problems of African American men in school leadership may seem a bit antiquated. Surely these problems are put away in the far corners of our minds because we are now worried about other major issues such as school violence, gangs, teenage pregnancy, dropouts, high stakes testing and shrinking resources to name a few. I know that society thinks these problems of men and minorities were solved long ago even before the invention of the computer, but the fact of the matter is that they still exist today. Among the qualities needed for any leader is a sense of direction, energy, and a determination to succeed that inspires others to perform. Moreover, the need for a model to describe effective leadership merits a priority status in educational research. Evidence of the importance of effective leadership is reflected in the Council of Great City Schools study by Manpower (2002). One important highlight of this study showed that there were some essential qualities needed by the superintendents in order for them to achieve excellence in their schools/districts. Additionally, the study found that the large urban school district that improved academically and reduced its achievement gaps was attributed to leadership. Those superintendents exemplified the following qualities: clear vision, strong leadership, relentless focus, political acuity, and personal accountability (Thomas, 2003).

A clear vision means that the superintendent knows what an effective school district looks like, has a strong belief in the value of all children, a strong will, humility, and a keen sense of mission to raise student achievement. Therefore, strong leadership

gives the superintendent the drive and determination to produce results and communicate his/her vision into clear goals for all stakeholders to understand. Furthermore, a relentless focus characterizes the successful superintendent as being able to focus and sustain not only his/her own energies, but that of others as well, over a long period of time despite running into obstacles. On the other hand, political acuity encompasses being able to balance conflicting interests, managing school boards and mayors, clear communication, sharing credit, taking the blame, and knowing how to negotiate among different community groups. Nevertheless, personal accountability requires that the superintendent have strong data systems in place to constantly monitor progress on reaching the goals of the district. Additionally, superintendents should be able to manage complex organizations, insist on operational excellence and financial integrity, and identify the strength of talented staff and place them in situations where they will be more effective. Finally, there is fortitude. The superintendent must, in Churchill's words, "never surrender." His task will always be great and the work will often be lonely.

### **Role of the Superintendent**

The role of the superintendent has changed tremendously since its beginning in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. An appointed board or elected lay board of education made all of the decisions of any significance while the role of the superintendent was that of a schoolmaster. In reality, the earliest superintendents were head teachers and clerks. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, most superintendents in the cities had shed this

role of clerical supervisor of students and teachers to become master teachers and educators (Carter and Cunningham, 1997).

Diverse school superintendents hold one of the most important and challenging jobs in America's education system (CGCS, 2009). In order to understand the way one leads, it is important to understand, "something about the developmental pathways those leaders have traveled" (Curry, 2000, p. 21). In this era of accountability and standards, superintendents are given the task of making visible and rapid movements in the academic achievement of the nation's most susceptible children. They must break down barriers to reform and build capacity for quality teaching and learning in their schools. They must unite parents, educators, school boards, and community leaders behind a clear and coherent vision of instructional purpose. With all things considered, leadership personas are unique and become evident through a person's individual psychology, and as a part of his developmental experiences. Effective leadership is a characteristic that shapes the individual as he or she changes within his developmental process. People are socialized by their families and influenced by people they meet during different stages in life. As a result of this, their values, beliefs, goals, and commitments will also continue to change throughout their lifetime. Despite the highly politicized environments of the big city school districts, superintendents must serve as mediators, statesmen, and agents of change.

The superintendents of schools in America have one of the most responsible and multifaceted roles in modern society. Their role makes them central to the welfare of their communities, but their job is seldom understood or fully appreciated. The

complexity of the job has them doing many different things during the course of the day. They are expected to be the top educator in the community, be understanding, and lead educational advancement and change within the system. They run the largest and most complex businesses in the community as well as a role in balancing the desires of parents and taxpayers, staff and community, liberals and conservatives, and religious and secular interests. They are also looked upon as the chief spokespersons for the district and its most visible face. They are often viewed as the “lightning rod” for conflict and controversy. The superintendent is often caught between the school board that makes policy for the school district and the professionals who must carry it out. They are like the “three men in the tub” all rolled into one – butcher, baker, and candlestick maker (Glass & Franceschini, 2007).

Nevertheless, he/she still has to perform all the duties and accept all of the responsibilities usually required of a superintendent as prescribed by the laws of the state, the rules and regulations of the Board of Regents and Commissioner of Education, laws and regulations of the United States, statutes of the state he is employed by, and the policies, rules, and regulations established by the Board of Education (Merrins, 2010). He/she informs the board about school programs, practices and problems and offers professional advice on items requiring Board action, with appropriate recommendations based on thorough study and analysis.

The Board expects the superintendent to remain current on educational thought and practices by reading educational publications, attending educational conferences and visiting other school systems in the interest of improving the district’s instructional

program and overall operation. The superintendent shall inform the Board and staff of new developments and significant events in the field of education. The job goal of the superintendent is ultimately to manage the school system and to provide leadership according to the school district's vision (Wayland, 2010).

### **Leadership in Diverse Settings**

Schools in urban settings are usually part of a large, central bureaucracy that may be slow to respond to the needs of the schools (Peterson & Brietzke, 1994; Weiner, 1999). Bureaucracies govern urban schools and this leads to inadequate functioning which separates the schools from the communities they are intended to serve (Weiner, 1999). Urban school districts are under pressure to bring resolution to the political and religious tensions that exist in the nation's social fabric. The "one size fits all" way of standardized educational practices was designed to serve all students in the same manner regardless of the individual student's educational needs. There are also issues of overcrowded classrooms, shortage of funding, and lack of materials. According to Weiner (1999), overcrowding in urban schools has been the norm for years and some students have been required to sit two and three to a desk.

The African American school superintendents have traditionally served in large urban cities with majority African American student populations such as Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, Atlanta, and Chicago (Jackson, 1995; Simmons, 2005; Tillman, 2004). While national data on the demographics of the superintendency has been collected by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) since 1953, AASA did not use race as a specific category until 1982, and data on Black

superintendents were subsumed under the category of “minorities” (Jackson, 1999). In 1982 data on African American superintendents signify that there were 57 African American superintendents, representing 0.7% of the school superintendents nationally (Valverde & Brown, 1988). By the 1989-1990 school year, the number of African American superintendents had increased to 142, or 1.6% of superintendents nationally (Jackson, 1995). Many of these African American superintendents served in large urban school districts, and in the 1997 school year 47% of all urban school superintendents were African American (Valverde, 2003).

Over the last 50 years, the newly found political and educational power of African Americans has led to an increase in the number of African American superintendents appointed nationwide. The National Alliance of Black School Educators (NABSE) reports that currently of the 14, 599 U.S. school superintendents, 323 are African American. Of these 323 superintendents, 222 are males and 101 are females, serving in 36 of the 52 states. According to NABSE, the largest numbers of African American superintendents serve in the states of Mississippi (43), Illinois (27), and Arkansas (25). In comparison to their European American counterparts, the numbers of African Americans appointed to superintendency positions have increased significantly, particularly in urban school districts.

NABSE and the Education Trust formed a partnership in 2003 to study African American in the superintendency. The report provides demographics about African American superintendents (approximately 248) who were members of NABSE in the fall of 2003 as well as the districts they served. Findings from the report included the



following: (a) the majority of the districts (148) had between 1 and 10 schools; 15 districts in this report had 100 schools or more. This pointed out that districts headed by African American superintendents from this group varied in size and population. (b) 133 of the 248 districts headed by African American Superintendents were in predominantly urban areas. However, African American superintendents were also in charge of 74 districts in rural areas., (c) More than 3 million of the 47.7 million public school students in the country; provided supervision to almost 6,000 schools and more than 193,000 teachers; and budgets totaling approximately 25.1 billion dollars were managed by these superintendents., (d) Of the more than 3 million students in districts led by NABSE superintendents, the ethnic breakdown consisted of 1.7 million or 54% African American students; 789,227 European Americans students, and 481,699 were Latino students., (e) Approximately 1.7 million of the 3 million students in these districts were classified as “low income” and came from a variety of economic backgrounds., (f) A total of 219 schools in districts led by this group scored in the top quartile on their respective 2002 state tests in reading and mathematics in the fourth and eighth grades. The schools identified in this report help dispel the myth that schools with large populations of people of color students cannot achieve at high levels.

These results show that there are success stories in districts with Black leadership. Even though this report is on a select group of African American superintendents, it is a representative sample of the majority of African American superintendents in the U.S. public schools.

As a tribute to one of the first African American males to be an urban school district superintendent, we must pay homage to Dr. Alonzo Crim. During the time of desegregation, the Atlanta Public Schools (APS) system in Georgia was experiencing conflicts between African American and European American students, teachers, administrators, parents, and the surrounding communities. The Atlanta Compromise in 1972, as the result of a federal desegregation suit, constituted that Atlanta Public Schools had to adjust their administrative staff so that 50% of the staff would be African American. In addition, APS had to hire an African American superintendent of schools. Dr. Benjamin E. Mays was the President of the Atlanta Board of Education at that time and was instrumental in the recommending of Dr. Crim for the position.

In 1973, Dr. Crim who was currently serving as superintendent of a school in California became the first African American superintendent of a school county in the South. Upon accepting this invitation, his vision was to create a county “where students would know that people cared about them”, and what he termed a “Community of Believers.” He believed the following factors: (1) Each student is a valuable person fully capable of learning. (2) Our school system can bring about learning. (3) The economic failure of the nation is dependent on the academic achievement of all students, and therefore. (4) Every person in the total community is a stakeholder and has a vested interest in the Atlanta Public School System.” By 1986, he managed to increase the student’s performance level in basic skills to above the national average, significantly increased attendance rates to higher than 92%, and brought the graduation rate up to

more than 70% (Pace, 2000). He was the longest tenured African American superintendent in the nation by 1986.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Introduction**

In this research study, five African American male superintendents in five diverse school districts in Texas will be selected in hopes of broadening the scope of experience. Each participant will be assigned pseudonyms. Each participant will be asked questions based on the instrument. The heart and soul of this research lies in the data. This qualitative study will use the actual words of the participants to tell the story, thus providing a rich representation of the ideas presented. Sarbin (1986) defines narrative as:

a way of organizing episodes, actions, and accounts of actions;  
it is achievement that brings together mundane facts and fantastic  
creations; time and place are incorporated. The narrative allows for  
the inclusion of actors' reasons for their acts, as well as the causes of  
happening. (p.9)

#### **Background**

The environment in which public schools exist in today's society consists of high stakes testing, lack of funding, continued pressures, high demands, and stressful accountability systems. These demands have caused school districts to reassess their needs and the characteristics of their leaders. As a result of this, school districts have recognized the need for diversity within their high-ranking administrative positions. After the year 1982, more African Americans were appointed superintendents of major

urban districts with large and rapidly growing minority populations (Jones & Montenegro, 1985).

**Table 3. Superintendent Race/Ethnicity According to District Size**

	<i>District Enrollment-2010</i>				
	<i>Fewer than 300</i>	<i>300 to 2,999</i>	<i>3,000 to 24,999</i>	<i>25,000 or more</i>	<i>All</i>
<b>American Indian or Alaska Native</b>	8	14	5	0	27
<b>Asian</b>	0	0	4	1	5
<b>Black or African American</b>	3	7	21	5	36
<b>Hispanic or Latino</b>	3	14	15	4	36
<b>Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander</b>	0	0	0	0	0
<b>European Americans (not Hispanic or Latino)</b>	159	1022	464	47	1692
<b>Other</b>	0	4	0	0	4
<b>Total</b>	173	1061	509	57	1800

African American superintendents faced several challenges beyond those facing all superintendents (Simmons, 2005). The two main challenges were: (1) accessing the superintendency, and (2) being employed in problem-ridden, low performing districts.

Large urban districts are likely to be the only category of school systems where superintendents of color constitute a majority. One of the focal points of the survey that was of great interest to my research was that of superintendent demographics. Table 3 shows superintendent racial/ethnic identification according to district size with the number of each race/ethnicity.

As the student and community demographics continue to change due to European Americans flight and school accountability systems, the underrepresentation of African American superintendents continues to be a serious problem across this nation. It is clear that the African American superintendents have not been proportionally represented. In order to make meaning of the information gathered, I chose to organize the data in the following manner: (1) a description of each district to include enrollment of students, demographic breakdown, number of campuses, awards and recognitions; and (2) a description of the community to include geographic location, population, demographics, major industry, average salary and the median income of household in that particular community.

### **The Districts**

District #1 enrollment consisted of 9, 238 students with a demographic breakdown of 48.6% African American, 5.7% Asian/Pacific Islander, 42.0% Hispanic, 0.2% Native American and 3.5% European American. The district is comprised of nine elementary schools, two middle schools, one ninth grade campus, one high school, and one alternative campus.

District #2 has an enrollment that consists of 2,057 students with a demographic breakdown of 24.2% African American, 63.2% Hispanic, and 12.3% European American. The district is comprised of an early childhood/pre-kindergarten school, one elementary school, one junior high school, and one high school. Special programs are available to all students through compensatory education, special education, English as a second language (ESL), career and technology education (CTE), gifted and talented (G/T), honors, pre-advanced placement (PAP) and advanced placement (AP) programs, as well as dual credit programs with several local colleges and universities. The district's student population is culturally and ethnically diverse; thereby contributing to its ambiance and making it a great place to go to school or work.

District # 3 has an enrollment of 35,350 students with a demographic breakdown of 40.1% African American, 4.5% Asian/Pacific Islander, 39.6% Hispanic, 0.2% Native American, and 15.7% European American. The district is comprised of twenty-six elementary schools, seven middle schools, and six high schools.

District #4 has an enrollment consists of 23,864 students with a demographic breakdown of 19.1% African American, 5.5% Asian/Pacific Islander, 44.4% Hispanic, 0.3% Native American and 30.6% European American. The district is comprised of twenty one elementary schools, three middle schools, four junior high schools, and four high schools. Based on the most recent accountability ratings, it is a Recognized District, with 75 % of its campuses ranked in the upper tiers of academic performance. It has 11 schools ranked Exemplary and 13 more earning Recognized status. The district has been

the recipient of the HEB Award for Excellence in Education, Large District and home to two No Child Left Behind National Blue Ribbon Schools.

District #5 The district's enrollment consists of 19,551 students with a demographic breakdown of 64.1% African American, 3.1% Asian/Pacific Islander, 16.4% Hispanic, 0.2% Native American, and 16.2% European American. The district is comprised of fifteen elementary schools, seven middle schools, and three high schools. The district has gone from only one campus receiving state recognition in 1996, to 24 of its 29 ratable schools receiving either recognized or exemplary status. With three Blue Ribbon schools, 16 of its schools are ranked in the top 12% of Texas' higher performance schools by the National Center for Educational Assessment. The district also had a large number of its campuses to receive the prestigious Successful School Award granted by the Texas Education Agency. In addition, the District's Headstart Program received the Program of Excellence Award from the Texas Headstart Association for 100 % compliance. It is also home to the State honor roll schools and a state and national demonstration school. Several of the schools in the district have received other recognition and honors, including being listed by Texas Monthly Magazine as a top 20 school.

### **The Communities**

Community #1 is located 86 miles east of a large diverse school district with a population of approximately 57, 755. A demographic breakdown of the population consists of 39% European Americans, 43.7% African American, 5.9% Asian, and 17.5%



Hispanic. This community is part of the oil and petrochemical business. The average salary for jobs is \$25, 989 and the median income of households is \$26, 455.

Community #2 is located 38 miles west of a large diverse school district with a resident population of approximately 447. The population consists of 81.4% European Americans, 9.4% African American, 0.9% Asian, and 19.2% Hispanic. The leading industries are educational, health and social services, manufacturing, and retail trade. The average salary for jobs is \$37, 104 and the median income of households is \$43, 250.

Community #3 is located 20 miles north of a large diverse school district with a population of 54, 298 persons. The racial makeup is 83.01% European American, 6.99% African American, 1.42% Asian, and 16.06% Hispanic. The median income for a household is \$56, 662.

Community #4 is located 35 miles southwest of a large diverse school district. It has a population of 33, 962. The demographics of this population are 25.9% European American, 13.5% African American, .3% Asian, and 58.2% Hispanic. The median household income is \$43, 283.

Community #5 is located on the west bank of the Neches River, about 85 miles east of a large diverse school district. It is a major Gulf Coast industrial center. Its economy today is dominated by the petrochemical industry. It has an approximate total population of over 113, 866 which can be broken down demographically into 46.4% European Americans, 45.8% African American, 2.5% Asian, and 7.9% Hispanic. The average salary for jobs is \$30, 424 and the median income of households is \$32, 183.

## **Purposeful Sample**

The participants selected in this sample represented a purposeful rather than random sample. The reason is that purposeful sampling attempts to include participants who have experienced the phenomenon under consideration and from those whom the researcher can learn the most (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998; Merriam, 1988). Patton (1990) writes:

The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information rich cases for in depth study. Information rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research. (p. 169)

Furthermore, without interaction, purposeful sampling and emergent design are impossible to achieve (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

For this study, I interviewed five African American male superintendents in various sizes of diverse school districts. Each participant was assigned pseudonyms. For the sake of this study, successful school districts were defined as having demonstrated prolonged improvement in closing achievement gaps and having been cited as an example of success through various award and recognitions. This study indicated that even though there are a high percentage of students meeting low-income criteria, these diverse school districts were still able to be high achievers. These superintendents have all garnered awards on the state and national level for the success in their respective districts.

The purpose of selecting the participants from different size school districts was to discover if any trends would emerge from the information obtained. The criteria for the selection of participants were as follows:

- African American male superintendents;
- Served in a superintendency role for at least three or more years;
- Is presently serving in the capacity of superintendent;
- Have impacted the district's academic performance as a result of their leadership role.

### **Positionality**

A qualitative study relies heavily on the researcher, a human, as the primary instrument. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained it this way:

Naturalistic inquiry is always carried out-logically enough- in a natural setting. Such a contextual inquiry demands a human instrument, one fully adaptive to the indeterminate situation that will be encountered. The human instrument builds upon his or her tacit knowledge as much as, if not more than, upon propositional knowledge and uses methods that are appropriate to humanly implemented inquiry: interviews, observations, document analysis, unobtrusive clues and the like. (p.187)

I was the primary instrument in this study. Nevertheless the interview served as the prime source of direct information received from the participants' perception on the construction of the leader persona and the way they led their school districts' toward successful academic achievement. The interview protocol emerged following a review

of literature while other questions were developed by my own experiences and curiosities that would provide information relating to the purpose of the study.

I used an interview guide approach to naturalistic interviews beginning with a list of concerns to be addressed by each contributor while permitting other topics to surface. In order to minimize the nuisance of predetermined responses when gathering data, I asked the interview questions in an open-ended fashion. The interview guide in this study consisted of three main issues: 1) personal; 2) leadership quality/effectiveness and 3) impact on student academic performance. Although the questions were developed prior to the interviews, I allowed myself to remain free to word questions in a way that would establish a conversational style interview. For example, a conversational style interview allowed me to develop new questions while continuing the flow throughout the interview. If necessary, I will request follow-up interviews upon review of the interview transcripts as needed for further explanation, elaboration or information verification. Hence, I used semi-structured interviews to seek explicit information that resulted from an outgrowth of previous interviews or specific information that provided comparable data across subjects.

In each case study, the interviews were conducted with the participants to seek an understanding of their self-perceptions regarding their leadership effectiveness. The interviews were held in the office of each participant, which provided a quiet location for conversation. I interviewed each participant with most of the interviews ranging from one and a half to two hours in length. In order to prevent the possibility of postponements, cancellation or schedule conflicts, I scheduled the interviews ahead of

time. Immediately following each interview, I organized notes taken during the interview. Organizing and reviewing the notes were done as soon as possible as to allow me to recall other things that were not noted when they occurred. Audio taped interviews involved rough-draft transcripts that I edited and typed in final form.

Each interview conducted was handwritten as well as recorded on audiotape with the consent of the participants. Handwritten notes involved my paying careful attention to what was said, and allowed me to make certain notations without making it known to the interviewee. In addition, taking notes did not require me to memorize statements made during the interview; however it allowed me to highlight important items for later review. On the other hand, using a digital audio recorder had many advantages, such as assuring completeness, providing the opportunity to review as often as necessary, and assuring that full understanding will be achieved. Audio recording my interviews provided me with an opportunity to later review nonverbal cues such as voice pitches and pauses, as well as material for reliability checks. Transcriptions were verified by myself and verified through comparison with the audio taped version. My participants received a copy of all transcripts for further verification and revision.

The data collected for this study consisted of five narrative sets of individual lived experiences. The open ended nature of questions allowed for individual participants to focus on what information about their experiences they felt was most pertinent to their leadership effectiveness. This was reflected in the narrative sets of the participants.

## **Data Collection**

Among the various data collection techniques, interviews can be considered the best way to get the information that is wanted (Merriam, 1998). In this study, data such as audio-taped interviews, recorded field notes, non verbal cues, and participant observations were used to gain information through nonlinguistic signs.

My field notes consisted of a written account of observations, conversations, experiences, and description of the participants and the events that directly or indirectly affected their way of leadership. Observations as defined by Marshall and Rossmann (1989), “are the systematic description of events, behaviors, and artifacts in the social setting chosen for study” (p.79), and can range from very focused to unstructured forms. Observations were scheduled with each participant prior to my arrival and data was analyzed upon the completion of each interview. The observations did not involve shadowing the participants on the job but being aware of the physical environment associated with the interview setting. Prior to the interviews, a human subject’s form was submitted and participants were assured that all personal information (name, etc.) would remain confidential.

## **Research Design**

This research study operated from a case study method on African American male school district superintendents. I adopted this qualitative research framework to gain an understanding of how these superintendents of urban school districts exercised and (re)interpreted (Dillard, 1995) their leadership. The intent of this case study was to broaden the limited research base relating to the lived stories and experiences of the

superintendency from those whose voices can inform others about pertinent issues of leadership through diversity. In order to develop a clearer understanding of the administrators perceptions on diverse leadership as it relates to student academic performance, this study investigated constructed meanings of the relationship between their lived experiences and the way they lead.

For this study, I utilized qualitative research methods to gain an in-depth look at the personal and professional characteristics, perceptions on the ways of leading, and approaches to academic student success for five African American male superintendents in diverse school districts. Research states that because qualitative methods come easier to the human as instrument, qualitative methods are stressed within the naturalistic paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By this, it is meant that the human as instrument leans more toward methods that are extensions of normal human behaviors, such as observing, listening, speaking, and reading.

Qualitative research is based on an interpretivist epistemology, where the social reality is seen as a set of meanings that are constructed by the individuals who participate in that reality. Therefore, the major purpose of this study was to discover the nature of those meanings. I covered several forms of inquiry that helped me to explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible. The focus of this study was on interpretation and meaning. Characteristics of qualitative research as explained by Merriam (1998) included an overarching interest in understanding the meaning people have constructed, and an inductive approach to

knowledge generation. In this research, I was the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, and my end product was narrative and descriptive.

Developing an understanding of how these principles contribute to their success. Interviewing will allow the interviewees to tell their own stories. Miles and Huberman (1994) asserted:

Qualitative data, with their emphasis on people's "lived experience", are fundamentally well suited for locating the meanings people place on the events, process, and structures of their lives and for connecting these meanings to the social world around them (p.10).

### **Data Analysis**

According to Marshall and Rossman (1989), it is not possible to understand human behavior without understanding the framework within which participants interpret their thoughts, emotions, and behavior. This research was grounded in the assumption that features of the social environment are constructed as interpretations by individuals and that these interpretations tend to be temporary and situational. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) asserted that qualitative research is multi-purpose in its focus, and involves an interpretative, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. Furthermore, qualitative methods enabled me understand, from the perspective of the participants, the complexity of their situations as well as the process and meaning of the events of their personal and professional lives. The importance of setting, context, and the participants' own frame of reference was emphasized as they allowed the emergence of constructs, which contributed to theory generation (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Lastly, I attempted



to value subjective, personal, meaning and definition, commonalities and voices to the oppressed.

Data analysis in a naturalistic inquiry, as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985), is open ended and inductive. Therefore data analysis begins during the data collection process and continues after the collection is complete. Data in this study was obtained from interviews, observations, and field notes. My interviews were written and audio taped. At a later date, I transcribed the interview notes verbatim, and rechecked them for accuracy. The process of analyzing the data occurred after each interview and observation. Conclusions were formed by unitizing, coding, and then categorizing the ideas and statements of experiences from the data to ensure that I have not missed any important constructs, themes, and patterns.

Working within the interpretive theory, and since I was the primary researcher and primary instrument for both data collection and data analysis, I was able to share the world of the researcher and interpret what I experienced there. I attempted to immediately begin making sense of the data along with the interpretation of the phenomenon that I am studying.

I employed the method of unitizing data that was considered as units of information to serve as the basis of the defining categories. Categorizing, with the help of index cards was used to outline categories that are related or of the same content. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), categorizing is proficient when it is defined in such a way that “they are internally as homogeneous as possible and externally as heterogeneous as possible” (p 349). So as a researcher, I had to examine, break down,

and compare the categorized data. I began by using the individual narrative sets to desegregate data concerning broad topics, while I examined categories for overlapping. I used the participant's personal, educational and employment background as the first category. The discussion of leadership qualities was the second category, along with the impact they have made on the success of their school district. From these categories, I have emerging themes from which grounded theory was derived.

### **Complementary Data Gathering Techniques**

In order to gather added data, other strategies and techniques were employed. The purpose of these techniques was to enhance the collection and interpretation of the data. Digital audio recordings, field notes, and non-verbal cues are discussed in the next section.

#### *Audio Recordings*

A digital audio recorder was used to record interviews with the participants. The transcriptions will be reviewed and corrected by the researcher.

#### *Field Notes*

The main reason I recorded my field notes was to compose a written document of the observations, dialogue, experiences, and descriptions of the participants and the events that affect them directly or indirectly. My field notes also served the purpose of recording feelings, thoughts about the investigation, and a way of keeping record of any follow-up interview sessions that may need to be scheduled by the participants. Field notes were transcribed after each interview or observation.

Some non-verbal techniques that I included are body movements, spatial relationships, use of time as in pacing, probing, and pausing, volume, voice quality, voice inflections, and touching (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I asked additional questions during the interviews so that I could get a better understanding of nonverbal cues.

### **Trustworthiness and Credibility**

The process of building trustworthiness in naturalistic inquiry is critical (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to increase trustworthiness and credibility in this study, I used an audit trail that reflected triangulation of the data through the use of interviews, observations, recorded field notes, and follow-up individual interviews. This procedure helped me keep the data in an understandable and retrievable form. In an effort to meet ethical standards, I assured my participants privacy, confidentiality, and inclusiveness. I also encouraged my participants to engage in member checks to review and clarify construction developed by myself, and if necessary, to revise these constructions.

### **Member Checking**

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), member checking is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility. This process involves participants verifying data and the interpretations collected through the interviews. The multiple benefits of member checking can be either formal or informal. It can possibly help to provide my participants with the opportunity to share additional information, correct errors, and to evaluate overall adequacy. Participants received a copy of the interview transcripts for review, clarification, and suggestions.

## **Transferability**

Transferability has been recommended as the qualitative counterpart for external validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Additionally they stated, “If there is to be transferability, the burden of proof lies less with the original investigator rather than with the person seeking to make the application elsewhere. The original inquirer cannot know the sites to which transferability might be sought, but the appliers can and do” (p. 298). This means that being the primary researcher, I may only describe one specific situation and its meaning of a particular situation for the participants in the study, and the reader applies the findings to situations in which he or she has been involved.

## **Dependability and Confirmability**

Dependability, which is the naturalist’s substitute for reliability, can be demonstrated by “taking into account both factors of instability and factors of phenomenal or design induced change” (p.289), according to Lincoln and Guba (1985). To establish dependability, it was necessary to examine the records for accuracy and to authenticate documents. Confirmability or objectivity was utilized during the data collection and analysis phases to verify and construct findings that may be important to increase what little is known about African American superintendents. In order to demonstrate confirmability, I kept a record of the inquiry process, copies of the taped interviews and discussions, notes from the interviews and discussions, and hard copies of all transcriptions.

## **Summary**

Qualitative research methods were chosen for my study due to its nature, setting, and personal interest. I took steps and followed procedures in order to provide an in depth look at the African American male superintendent's perceptions on leadership. I investigated the constructed meanings of the relationship between lived experiences and the way they lead by employing interpretive lenses. I want to emphasize the naturalistic inquiry that helped me to investigate the lived stories and experiences of the superintendency. It is from these African American male superintendents' voices that others can be informed about issues of leadership through diversity.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

#### Introduction

This data analysis presents the voices of five African American male superintendents and their leadership in diverse school districts in Texas. In this study, as the role of the researcher, I used the actual words of the participants to tell their story in hopes of providing a rich representation of the ideas presented. I have attempted to tell each superintendent's story through data that have been gathered from observations, interviews, and audio taping. I chose to organize the data in the following manner: (a) an introduction and description of each participant, (b) an individual review of interview responses by each superintendent, and (c) presentation of themes arranged categorically and supported by the data from the individual interviews, and the overall responses to the research questions. The participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identity.

The superintendents spoke words that were often repetitious and rhythmic in nature in isolated environments. For example, they all talked about balancing work and being a father, and family values and support. Through an in-depth analysis of thick description of experiences that overlapped the experiences of another, and yet another, it became my desire to express these superintendent's voices with the same passion and emotion that was observed during the interviews. These narratives told of their journeys from childhood to the superintendency. The three overall arching research questions to guide this study were:

1. How do African American male superintendents describe their personal

characteristics related to success in their diverse school district?

2. How do the selected African American male superintendents exercise and interpret their acts of leadership?
3. What are these African American male superintendents' perceptions about leadership related to student academic achievement in their urban school district?

The 18 interview questions were semi-structured and open-ended in nature (See Appendix A). They were formulated according to the theoretical framework previously discussed in Chapter II. The individual interviews allowed the superintendents to share their stories related to the experiences they have had while being an African American male superintendent leading a diverse school district in Texas.

This section begins with a portrait of each participant. There were four major themes that emerged from the interviews with the superintendents. The major themes were: (1) strong parental influence; (2) athletes (competitive); (3) teacher/coach; (4) improving district's performance; (5) visibility in community; (6) educated during Civil Rights era; and (7) mobility. There were twelve subthemes that emerged under the major themes. Strong parents for their children and developed leadership and mentorship were sub themes under strong parental influence. Teamwork, character building, discipline, and competitiveness were subthemes under athletes. Mentoring and mentoring programs was a subtheme under teacher/coach. School programs that support academic achievement and program development were subthemes under improving district's performance. Community involvement and working to pass Bond Issues were

subthemes under visibility in the community. Supporter of equity issues was a subtheme under being educated during the Civil Rights era. The superintendent's responses to the individual interview questions as related to the research questions will then be discussed and the section will be summarized.

### **The Equitable Superintendent's Story**

This superintendent was very adamant about making sure that everyone was treated with equality. He gave himself the title of being a leader for human civil rights through education. Thus, we will refer to him as the "Equitable Superintendent." The Equitable Superintendent's education background consists of earning his Bachelor and Master degrees from Texas State University (formerly known as Southwest Texas State University) and his Doctorate of Philosophy from the University of Texas at Austin. He has previously served as a deputy superintendent in the Houston area, a superintendent in the Dallas area, and a superintendent in Georgia. He is currently in his sixth year as superintendent of a diverse school district in southeast Texas.

It is important to comment on the comfortable and welcoming atmosphere that existed throughout the Equitable Superintendent's interview. From the minute I walked in the building I was eager to get started. The entrance of the building reminded me of going into a bank. The two receptionists were sitting at desks behind a thick glass that reached the ceiling. It has two openings; one round opening so that the receptionist could hear your request through and another horizontal opening that was only big enough for you to slide a clip board through for you to turn in paperwork or fill out a guest questionnaire.



As I waited in the reception area, I decided to get up and walk around to look at some of the photos on the wall. The first thing to capture my attention was the fact that all seven of the school board members were African American. I also noted a large plaque on the wall that read about the building that we were in had just been completely renovated in 2011. That would explain the smell of the oak hardwood floors that seemed to spread throughout the building. The wooden design did not consist of only being on the floor, but proceeded to about half way up each of the walls. The shine of the floors and the design of the floors gave the building a very attractive look. When I was called and escorted by the receptionist to come to the superintendent's suite, I was greeted by smiles of other employers in the building. This made me feel welcomed. As I sat in the suite, I began to look at photo albums of different activities that went on in the school district. The high school had just completed a very successful football season and had fallen a game short of making it to the state championship. I could tell that there was a lot of community support for the football team's effort this past season. Of course, I had to remind myself that here in Texas, football is definitely king! As I sat there looking through the photo albums, a tall gentleman walked by with papers under both arms and said "Hello." I recognized from the picture that it was the superintendent that I came to interview. After he had relieved himself of the papers he was carrying he came back out to the waiting room in his suite, greeted me with a firm handshake and smile, and led me back to an area he felt would be best to hold the interview. From my seat he looked as if he was tall, but now that I had stood up, my perception was correct. Since I'm 5'11", I can safely say that he stood over 6'2" tall. He mentioned to me that his

office was being used for a bond hearing that was being simulcast with other individuals through out the United States and abroad so he told me the best area to do the interview would be in this huge kitchen area adjacent to his office. This way he would not be a distraction to the other people and we would not be a distraction to them.

I sat down across from him, introduced myself, and we began the interview. He began to tell me a little about himself. He gave me the outline of first he would tell me where he's from, about his family, and then get into his educational and work experience. He grew up in Austin, Texas, went to grade school and completed high school there. His mother is still alive at 91 years of age and his father is deceased. There were six children in the family, four boys and two girls. He emphasized that they had a nice family, a strong bond, and a strong neighborhood environment in East Austin. They grew up in the United Methodist Church and things went well in his early years. He was an athlete in his middle as well as high school years in Austin. After high school he was recruited to attend Southwest Texas State University in San Marcos (now called Texas State University) where he was the first African American athlete at the school in 1966. He was recruited to play basketball (I could believe that by his height), a game in which he still plays today.

He graduated from there with a degree in physical education as his major and political science as his minor. His initial interest was law, but the coaches encouraged him to go into physical education thinking it would be easier for him to graduate, to do well in school and they lacked the confidence in him that he could do the work of the government curriculum. He ended up making good grades in government, but rather

than go into law, he went into education. He also completed his master's degree at the same institution. He completed his doctorate from the University of Texas at Austin. He earned a Doctor of Philosophy degree while at University of Texas- Austin, and the topic of his dissertation was "Leadership Behavior and School Effectiveness." His research led him to look at what urban schools were doing in terms of leadership. He looked at the degree to which the home, schools, and church worked in partnership to have an effect on education and the leadership styles of the principals. He wanted to know if the principals considered themselves collaborative in terms of their approach or dictatorial or somewhere in between.

He started his work career in San Antonio, Texas. He was a teacher and a coach. He then transferred back to Austin where he taught and coached for several years; first in middle school then in high school. On the high school level he was one of the youngest head basketball coaches in the State of Texas at that time. He then went from the classroom to central office, but didn't stay very long. His hunger to go back to the school environment which led him to work as an assistant principal and later move up to principal. He decided to leave Texas to take a job in Cleveland, Ohio where he became the deputy superintendent and stayed there for about two years. He was recruited to return to Texas to become the executive deputy superintendent in the Houston area. He landed his first superintendent job in a district that was under state takeover in the Dallas area. He went in as part of a team to turn things around and they did very well. He then was recruited to become a superintendent in Birmingham, Alabama and stayed

there four years. He then moved to become a superintendent in DeKalb County, Georgia for two and a half years, and then came back to Texas to work in his present position.

When asked the question of “What did you feel are some of the significant personal qualities, values, and behaviors necessary for leadership?” his reply was:

I grew up in a home where values and character meant something. I believe in treating people right, being fair, honest in all that I do, personal life as well as my work. My mother, long ago, coached and supported the family into the mentality of always trying to help other people. In fact, for many years, we talked about what I did each day. We’d talk about whether I had done anything good for people. And I have maintained that attitude.

He went on to mention that he has maintained that attitude throughout his career. He initially considered going into law. Part of the reason why he thought that it would be a good idea to complete his law degree was to do some work in law; particularly in the area of human civil rights to help people, and then to work, to be elected to congress, and work as a congressman. He thought if he could just get to Congress, he could make a difference. His interest had to do with human civil rights. He decided that he would do the work in terms of human civil rights through education. His master’s degree was in counseling, which connected him with his interest. He thought that by getting the highest terminal degree, he would be able to influence more people and people would listen to him.

Furthermore, he also stated why people have often thought of him as being a bit straightforward:

I'm convinced that people would pay more attention to a success story, particularly if you've been in different situations, like here in this district where they struggle. The state took over this district when I was recruited to come here. We quickly worked to get the state out within a month. They had been here a year and a half, and I was pretty strong in my comments to the state; "You recruited me in, so we don't need two superintendents. We don't need the state running it and me, so you need to leave, and let me do my work, or I'll leave, and then you go get somebody else." That's pretty much what I told them and it worked out very successfully. They got out within a month. Human Civil rights can be looked upon as, "What can I do to reach out to help others?" In particular, I am referring to the least of them. Those who have been or who are struggling economically, who have difficulties staying in school, being successful in school, difficulties in getting into college, and so forth.

So human civil rights is helping other people, lifting people up, being honest, having integrity, exhibiting high character, having a hard work ethic, and doing the best you can to help people. So that pretty much was his story. That's what I do. I'm a human – I'm a leader for human civil rights through education.

The Equitable Superintendent has a very busy schedule. While we were conducting the interview he has his two cell phones out on the table for him. He informs me that one of them is for the business of the district and that the other is his personal cell phone. His personal cell phone rings and he tells me that he has to take this call because he has been waiting on it. He excuses himself and walks out of the room for no

more than two minutes. When he returns, he looks me in the eyes and tells me to never get too busy for your family. He had just received a phone call from his son concerning some personal matters. That definitely stuck in my mind because that gesture stressed the importance of family. When the whole world may be against you, a strong family bond is what can help to see you through!

This superintendent felt that he probably pays more attention to race and to class and to other circumstances more than others because of his background experiences as being the first African American athlete at his college. The treatment he received in the venues where they played and the denial of certain hotels to let the team stay overnight because they had an African American player gave him a broader perspective on race relations. He grew up in the era of civil rights. Through his life experiences, he has seen that things are very inequitable in terms of opportunities for learning for children. He thinks that it is important to do the right thing with children by making sure their resources are equitable and the quality of teaching is equitable. When children have the information and they have excellent teachers, they perform.

In regards to his personal life, he felt that positions of leadership require a lot of time. He made a commitment years ago to devote whatever time it takes to be successful. A common day for him is from 7:00 in the morning to about 9:00 or 10:00 at night on most days. Every now and then, a Saturday or a Sunday, but he has to take some time off and try to enjoy life. He chooses to be accessible by phone and he attends the Parent- Teacher Organization (PTO) meetings all of the time and athletic events. He wants the children to know their superintendent. When he was coming up through

school, he never met his superintendent. He wants the teachers, as well as the students, to have direct access to him. As such, he arranges advisory committees for teachers and committees for students to communicate directly with him.

In order to establish a successful learning environment for his district, the district has to think and act systematically and be goal directed. A plan is set in place each year, he and the board meet to set goals about where they are headed and the objectives needed to reach those goals. They also use data to monitor their progress and hold everybody accountable for results. For continued success, it is important to establish a positive relationship with others around you. His tolerance level for laziness is not very strong, and he doesn't accept excuses. The Equitable Superintendent also has a strong belief system in doing what's right to accomplish the desired outcomes. The four questions he often asks are; What are you doing, how are you doing it, what's the expected outcome, and why did you do it that way? He terms this strategy as his **WHOW** method. He scowled when he emphasized the fact that he has a difficult time with people who are not goal directed and with people who are not as dedicated or don't appear to be committed to working hard. He also believed it is important to hold people accountable and that means communicating in writing as well as verbally. In closing the interview he reminded me that he does not raise his voice, but he can be rather direct. His main ingredient for his formula for success was that the treatment of people matters.

### **The Indigenous Superintendent's Story**

This superintendent's educational background consists of earning an associate degree from Blinn Jr. College in Texas, his Bachelor and Master of Science degrees

from Prairie View A&M University. He held no other superintendent positions before being named the superintendent of a rural school district west of Houston, but he has an educational career that has spanned 37 years in the same school district; thus I will refer to him as the Indigenous Superintendent. He has held positions such as teacher, football coach, assistant principal, and high school principal. Currently, he has been the superintendent for the past four years.

As I pulled up to this superintendent's administrative building. I was the first one in the parking lot. I realized that I was approximately forty five minutes early so I did not panic, but I did check to make sure I was at the right address. When the time of my appointment was near, I walked up the stairs to enter the building. Upon entering I was greeted by a large smile and the echoing words of "Good Morning, Sir!" I mentioned to her that I was there to interview the superintendent and I got the impression that she was expecting me; that made me feel good. She pointed me in the direction of the room, offered me a bottle of water, and told me that they would be with me shortly. As I went into the building's conference room and sat down to get my recorder, pen, and paper in a position that was comfortable to me an African American female walked in, sat down, and started talking to me. We immediately had the look on our faces as if one of us were in the wrong room and it turned out to be me. This lady was one of the superintendents for curriculum and instruction in the district and she thought I was a textbook distributor coming to propose a new edition of text books to the district. We both laughed and the assistant superintendent stepped out of the room to tell the receptionist that the meeting rooms had been changed and she forgot to inform her about the change. I was then



escorted down the hall where I was able to meet the superintendent's secretary that I had been communicating with over the phone to schedule an appointment. The superintendent was enroute to his office so she assured me that he would be there soon. A few minutes passed by when I recognized the man that I was going to interview. As I looked at him, I recognized his face and I thought that we must have crossed paths at some previous time. As we stood and reminisced, we came to the conclusion that we use to attend the same barber shop.

We then entered his large office suite that had a large desk and a very large conference table that could seat eight people. We started the interview and just like the Equitable Superintendent, he was also a former athlete. With his stocky build, I was sure he was a football player; and that he was. He graduated from high school right at the beginning of integration. He played junior college ball at Blinn Junior College and then later transferred to Prairie View A&M University to finish out his athletic and academic career. His road to the superintendency started out with his being a physical education, health, and social studies teacher. Unlike most superintendents, he grew up in and attended the schools in the very district of which he is now the superintendent.

He was in the classroom for 16 years when the principal of the school wanted to know what he had to offer that would help get the discipline under control. His reply was:

If you would take me out of the classroom, put me involved with discipline, let me come up with the rules that are legal and let me be the final say, I think I could change the atmosphere, and the culture of Blue High School.

Within a couple of weeks, the principal came back. The principal said, “That’s what you’re going to do. Next year, you’ll be over all of our discipline here at the high school as the assistant principal.” He did such a great job, that when the next year passed, he was named the principal of the school. This is definitely what I call being on the fast track. Within four and half year period, he directed the high school from a low performing campus to exemplary to a National Blue Ribbon finalist with basically the same teachers he had when the school was considered to be low performing. The logic behind his success came from lessons that were taught on the football field:

We just took a different approach to what we were doing and how we were doing and how we looked at kids and taking the data that were already available to us and looking at this data and letting this data drive instruction even before it was popular. We were doing that, but I draw on my coaching background for that because that’s what we always have done. We have always taken our kids, and we’ll divide them up into tight ends, defensive ends, down linemen, linebackers. We broke those parts down and then we bring them together, at the end of the day, as a whole and make them run as a unit.

Well, it’s the same thing in education. You have to know where your problems are. You have to give individual attention to those bubble kids, and if you get individual instruction to those bubble kids, you will get them where you need to be. They might not get to the top of the mountain, but they’ll be a long ways from where they were before.

He stressed that some of his significant personal qualities that have helped in leadership have been having the willingness to stand for what is right and not what is popular. His family background with his parents was also important. His parents raised three boys and a girl, and they would always say, “You guys are as good as anybody. Never let people plant trees for you to sit under. You choose your own trees to plant and sit under.” His parents were not educated, but that statement has stayed with him all of his life. Another quality of leadership is not being confrontational but informational. He was given an award from the state for being one of the best African American administrators. His question was, “Why didn’t it say I was one of the best administrators?” He accepted the award, but took it as a backhanded slap.

When I asked the Indigenous Superintendent about leadership that caused for sustained reform he indicated that there is nothing he wouldn’t ask the building principal to do that he would not do or has not done. There’s nothing he would not ask a classroom teacher to do that he has not done and is still willing to do. He emphatically stressed the fact that people have to move past the pompous attitude about where their positions are because he believes the higher you are, the more you need to serve.

His response to, “Do you want to be held accountable?” was “Hell, yeah. Hold me accountable but make sure you give me the tools to be successful, and those tools have to be defined by my kids, what my kids’ needs are.” The superintendent felt that if he is going to have success in his district, he must stay within his lanes. He concluded by stating:

I don’t try to go home and tell my mom, who’s a great cook, how to make a

German chocolate cake. She's an expert in it. And the same token, I'm not expecting my mom to come over and tell me how to best run my school district. I am supposed to be the expert.

### **The Executive Superintendent's Story**

This superintendent's educational background consists of him earning his associate degree from Southwestern Christian College, his bachelor's degree from David Lipscomb University, and a Master of Education Degree and Doctor of Education degree from Stephen F. Austin. As I peered over at the books on his bookshelf, the titles read; "*The Five Temptations of a CEO*," "*The Four Obsessions of a CEO*," and "*The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*." All of these books about being the Chief Executive Officer led me to refer to him as the Executive Superintendent. Prior to his present position he has served as a superintendent in east Texas for three years and an Assistant Superintendent of Personnel for five years. For the past six years, he has been the superintendent of a fast-growing diverse school district north of Houston.

As I approached the three story glass front entrance to the administration building, I was thinking about the interview questions that I wanted to ask. I opened the door and approached the receptionist's desk and she asked me for my driver's license. So far this had been the only administrative building that had required me to show my license as proof of identification. I gladly did what was asked of me and she printed me a visitors badge to identify myself to the other employees of the building. She told me to have a seat and that someone would be with me shortly. I finally met Ms. Lisa, the superintendent's secretary whom I had spoken with on the phone to make arrangements

for the interview. This superintendent requested that I send him a copy of the interview questions prior to the interview. I had no problem with this because I thought that this would make the interview flow smoothly.

I sat in the waiting area of his secretary's office. She informed him by phone that I had arrived. He opened the door and walked out to greet me. Unlike my previous two superintendents, he was not as tall. He was short in stature, but you could tell that he walked and talked with confidence. When I first laid my eyes on him, I thought about a phrase my dad would often describe himself as "being a small piece of leather, but well put together." I went into his office suite and it was enormous. On one end of the office was his all black desk with a high back, black leather chair. In the middle of his suite was a long conference table that could seat up to 12 persons and on the opposite end of the office was a small sofa with two Queen Anne high back chairs. Of course the conference table along with the sofa and chairs were black to complete his matching décor. Completing the furniture on this side of the suite was also a coffee table along with two end tables. We sat down in the two high back chairs across from each other and began the interview.

He grew up in the Midwest and went to college to study religion and ministry. He worked in St. Louis, Missouri as an associate pastor for about five years and then worked in a couple of other places across the country such as Nashville, Tennessee, Dallas, and Maryland. In order to supplement his income while in Maryland, he decided to do some substitute teaching. He didn't know much about the schools in that area, but one day he got a call at 5:00 am in the morning and he had to report to an elementary

school. Upon his arrival he discovered that this was the district's behavioral school for students with behavioral issues. This was his first time, so he felt like he was being thoroughly immersed in the fire immediately.

He walked into the office that morning, introduced himself, and the principal directs him to the classroom but tells him that he needs to get there before the teacher leaves. He got to the classroom, introduced himself to the teacher and she says, "You can have it," and she walks out. He ended up being in that class for two weeks because the teacher of record had abandoned the class. The class was made up of fifth graders and he fell in love with this new job. He just wasn't sure what he would be doing with a group of emotionally disturbed kids but he took a liking to them and became attached to them. He did not view them as being disturbed and ended up doing a long term assignment at that school. This experience led him to go back to school to get certified.

His ministry moved him to Texas just as he had finished his certification in Maryland. So now he had to get certified in Texas. He moved with an understanding that even though he was asked to be the minister at this church, he would also teach school. He started out teaching elementary school for two years, then moved to middle school to teach math for three more years.

His path to the superintendency started when the principal that he had been working under for four of the five years mentioned to him that the assistant principal was retiring and he wanted to hire him as the replacement. He had not taken the necessary classes needed to become an administrator so he went to summer school to get the twelve hours that were required and applied for an emergency certificate. When the fall

came around, he was hired as the assistant principal. He did that for two years, and then got a call from a neighboring district that they were interested in him as a principal. He accepted the position as an elementary school principal and ended up only doing that for two years. His superintendent called and wanted him to apply for the assistant superintendent of personnel because the person that was in that position was retiring. This is when he started to think that his career was moving too fast. His first thought was the reason he went back to school was to just really work with kids, but now, he felt as though he was getting pulled back into the adult part of the world. Putting those thoughts aside, he applied for and got the job and stayed in that position for five years.

The superintendent who had called him for the assistant superintendent position was now retiring and wanted him to apply for the superintendent position. Initially, he declined the offer because his wife was running for political office at the time in a neighboring county and he did not want to disrupt her plans. He was heavily involved in his wife's campaign. In that April, she ran, she was in a runoff election, and lost the runoff election. Once losing the runoff, it opened him up to the possibility of relocating. He called the superintendent and put his name back into the hat and he got the job. He held the superintendent position for three years. His baby girl had now finished high school and went to college. This meant that the last of his three girls were gone and he and his wife always wanted to move to a metropolitan area once the girls were gone.

This executive superintendent got his training in the church about leadership. He grew up studying a lot of biblical leaders. For instance, Moses as he led a group through

the wilderness and then others who did great stints of leadership. One of the significant personal qualities that he stated was:

Believe that people want to do the right thing. Most people want to do the right thing even if they're not doing the right thing. So I think I was heavily influenced with my responsibility to try to help people find the best within themselves and to give them an opportunity to flourish in what that self is.

He has developed his own style of leadership. He's heavy into executive-what he calls executive leadership. By that, he means the role of the executive is to get things done through others. To clarify this concept, he described this leadership to me in more detail by saying:

I look at leadership in three phases. The first is the technical leader, the person who gets things done. A teacher is a technical leader. An assistant principal is a technical leader. You have technical skills that people rely on to get things done. The next level or the next phase I refer to as the executive leader whose job it to get things done through others, and sometimes people struggle when they don't know the difference. They see the principal as a larger assistant principal when truly it's a different skill set. When I was an assistant principal there were a lot of things that I was responsible for making sure they happened and the principal relied on me for. But when I became the principal, I had to develop a team of people that I got things done through, and if I got bogged down too much into the technical aspect of the job, then my job was going to go lacking. The skill set of a principal is to get things done through others. The primary means of



accomplishing that is through talking as opposed to doing. The ultimate form of leadership, for me is what I call the moral leader, where I think about the technician and about getting things done. When I think about the executive, it's about getting things done through others. When I think about the moral leader, it's about setting vision and making people believe in something, making people want to aspire to be something, and making people willing to cast themselves aside for a greater cause.

He devotes a lot of time to people development and leadership development. He confidently expresses that he has the ability to rally people around a call, make people want to improve something, make things better than they actually are and contribute to something that is bigger than who they are or bigger than the time and space in which we live on the planet.

Reflecting on his early school years, he had negative experience in which he was moved to a higher grade but struggled to keep up. This made him feel like a failure. From this point forward, this experience gave him a real negative tone about school. He did not care for school and struggled as a reader. He did not break out of this slump until he entered the seventh or eighth grade. He did not start reading again until his interest grew about reading the Bible. So when he became a teacher, he wanted to make sure school was better than it was for him. He felt as though school was doing some strange things just to get grades and pass kids on, but they weren't really learning. He really got into being creative and doing things differently to challenge the system. He continued this school of thought when he was chosen as principal and had his teachers to rally

around that philosophy. He had great success. His main drive for continued success is to still have an impact on what happens daily in the classroom even though he is far removed from it.

One of the obstacles that he faces is education being part of a bureaucratic system. Education is very bureaucratic from the federal level down to the state level down to the district level to the building level, and so the bureaucracy makes it very difficult to change the system. Education has a way it does things, and it is not easy to undo. He feels as though school is no longer about learning, it's about getting through it. It's about students knowing it long enough to give it back to the teacher. The Executive Superintendent felt that the one true grade that is about learning is kindergarten. His sentiments were:

Everything I need to know I learned in kindergarten. Kindergarten is the one place we learn. Everything else, we start drumming the learning out of kids. By the time they get into middle school, most of them don't really like school, and by the time they get into high school, it's just about how do we get through this.

He summed up the superintendent's role as very executive. Learning to get things done through others is how one becomes successful. A superintendent's success should be about making people successful. It's all about helping people to find what they do well and to allow them the opportunity to do that every day. He remembers having a teacher on his staff that taught fourth grade and was having a horrible year. He called her into his office and told her that he had a kindergarten position that he wanted her to take.

She boo-hoed and cried about taking that position, but she is still friends with the superintendent today and she is still teaching kindergarten.

In order to establish successful learning environments, he felt that it was not easy because he is not into the school reform “stuff” that we hear so much about. He is more into school transformation and he thinks the school should change the way it does business. If we (educators) are going to change instruction in the classroom, then the principals have to change the way they relate to teachers and the superintendents have to change the way they relate to principals. We need to lead the change we seek. If educators are trying to create a change in the classroom, they are trying to create a 21<sup>st</sup> century classroom with a 19<sup>th</sup> century administration. To illustrate his thoughts on this, he painted the following picture for me:

If you had the ability to awaken a physician from the grave who practiced 200 years ago and sent him into today’s hospital, he couldn’t function. However, if you awakened a teacher from 200 years ago and sent him to today’s classroom, she’d do just fine because it won’t be that much of a change other than learning about electricity and going from a black board to a European Americans board. It’s pretty much the same because we don’t change.

Besides from establishing successful learning environments, he believes that the superintendent must be a notorious reader if you want to be a good leader. The most valuable advice that I took from this interview were some words of advice that he gave me at the conclusion of my interview while my tape recorder was still running:

Have what I refer to as a board of trustees in your life which is just three or four

folk you believe love you and care about you and who don't make a move without talking to those three or four people. You trust them as your board of trustees, and you make life decisions by consulting with those folks. And sometimes, they have to tell you when something is not good for you or when you shouldn't do something.

### **The Primal Superintendent's Story**

This superintendent's tendency to always be the first to arrive at work earned him the distinction of the Primal Superintendent. His educational background consists of him earning his associate's degree from Blinn College, his bachelors and masters degrees from Texas A&M University and his Doctorate of Education degree from Oklahoma State University. For the past eleven years, he has been the superintendent of a diverse school district in west Texas.

I turned into this district's administrative building parking lot to find that it was bustling with activity. It was early in the morning, but people were going about their business of getting their work day started. I entered the building and I gave the receptionist a copy of my driver's license so that she could print me a visitor's I.D. badge. While I signed the visitor's log she picked up the phone to inform the Primal Superintendent's secretary that I had arrived. As I was standing in the atrium of the lobby, looking around to satisfy my curiosity, the secretary came downstairs to escort me to his office. Upon meeting the secretary, I was glad to finally put a face with the name since we had communicated on more than one occasion. The superintendent came out of his office suite to meet me and I viewed him as a gentleman of average height which I

consider to be 5'11" for a male. His demeanor gave the appearance that he was all about business. He didn't have time to play around, let's get started, get to the point, and get this interview completed. As I sat down in the comfortable black leather chairs in his suite, you could not help but notice that one side of his office had glass walls that overlooked the parking lot, the entrance of the building, the busy highway that was in front of the building, and a view over the city as far as the eyes could see. Two mature oak trees could be seen that gave a book end appearance to his office as one would gaze outside from left to right. This open layout of his office had one of the best views that I had seen. It seemed like it could be an artist's canvas. He could paint a different picture each day and not be the same just because of the constantly changing scenery.

We sat down to start the interview and I gave each superintendent a little snippet of who I am and my background. He began with his pathway to the superintendency after earning his doctorate from Oklahoma State University. Originally from Texas, he moved back and went to work at a high school in the Woodlands, Texas as an assistant principal for a year. After a year in that position, he moved to the position of assistant principal for three years. He then moved to a junior high school and served as principal for five years. Next, he moved to central office where he held the title of Assistant Superintendent for Secondary Education in a school district north of Houston, Texas. This tour of duty lasted for six years and then he got his first opportunity to become a superintendent.

His take on the qualities needed to become a leader led him to express that in order to be a good leader; you've got to understand that you've got to be willing to allow

other people to do their work. He was not someone who just directed people to do things, but he modeled the behavior he wanted to see in his organization. If he wants to be called a good leader, it's because most people feel like he is not going to ask them to do anything he would not do.

When he first became superintendent of this district eleven years ago, he led his initial staff development. This gesture was looked upon as a "first" for this school's community. He wanted to model for them that as a leader and an administrator in the district that he was responsible enough to take whatever focus he was looking at and lead by example. To continue this "lead by example" trend, he gave everybody in the organization an opportunity to sit down and talk to him directly. He went to each one of the campuses and stayed all day. While there, he had each campus principal set him up in a room away from the principal's office so that faculty and staff would not feel as though someone was watching who was talking to the new superintendent. He literally just sat and listened to anything they wanted to tell him and he jotted down notes. In fact, he still has the notebook in his possession that he took from the first time he met with the staff.

Afterwards, he came back and sat down with his secretary and she typed up everything that he had heard from his individual meetings throughout each campus. He immediately addressed what he coined as "the low hanging fruit;" those things that didn't require any long term systematic plan and could be taken care of and corrected right away and he did that. This gesture definitely made talk around the water cooler in the teacher lounges throughout the district. The faculty and staff were actually able to

see that he heard them. This was one of the things that he felt made a huge difference with everybody within the organization. This superintendent knows that the numbers in his organization have grown, but the custodian, the maintenance person, the teacher, or anyone who wanted to talk to him could. People of this district can come to his office and set up an appointment, come in and visit with him, catch him out on the street and visit with him, and know that he is interested in hearing their views and not just hearing them but taking action where it is warranted.

He also stressed that leadership involves being a good listener. He expressed to me the fact that there was a difference between sitting and hearing someone versus really listening to them. When he sat down and met with each of the faculty and staff members throughout the district, they wanted him to give answers and he would not do it. He was very adamant about not answering their questions, because he felt as though he couldn't listen when he was talking. He realized that some people felt uncomfortable with it, but he wanted to hear what they had to say so he sat and listened the entire time.

One thing that this superintendent considers as a strong quality was his work ethic. His secretary said to him when he first came on board, "You're the first superintendent that I have not been able to beat to work." A recently hired cabinet member made the comment to him that, "I just can't beat you to work." He is at his office early in the morning and late in the afternoon. People can drive by and see the light on in his office and they can see that he's working. This sends the message to his staff that when he tells them that they need to make sure they get the work done. He does

not monitor whether his staff is there from eight to five, but what he does monitor is the quality of work that comes out.

The choices that facilitated his becoming a superintendent were different in the fact that he did not start out with the goal of being a superintendent. He started out as a teacher because he had a role model that he was determined to be just like. In fact, he went into the same teaching field because he wanted to be just like him. This teacher who he wanted to walk in the shadows of was an African American, lived in his community, and taught Sunday school.

After he became a teacher along the way, he had actually decided that he wanted to work at the university level so that was the main reason why he went back to work on his doctorate. Upon completing his doctorate, he discovered that there was a job opening in administration at one of the state universities. He was talking with a professor about the job and he said he will never forget what that professor told him. He said, “How are you going to be able to supervise administrators and you’ve never been an administrator.” Not wanting to send him home too disappointed, he encouraged the superintendent to get a few years of administration experience and then come back and they would re-evaluate the situation. But before he left, he pointed him in the direction of the school that gave him his first administrative position.

He has always been taught and believed that if you do a good job in whatever field you’re in, there are opportunities that will open for you. The superintendent saw him doing such a great job as an assistant principal that he was asked if he was interested in becoming a principal. From there he moved to his assistant superintendent position in



central office. This then led to his becoming a superintendent. So, his ascension to the superintendency wasn't about a matter of this being his path. He felt that he was an example of having job opportunities come his way as a result of doing good things and one job led to another.

He grew up in a single parent home. He had a brother and two sisters and his mother was a maid for some folks in Houston. He grew up in the county. He did everything that you could possibly do from chopping cotton from \$5.00 a day to picking cotton for \$1.50 to bailing and hauling hay. This is where he feels his strong commitment to a work ethic was born. He and his siblings left home at dark and came home at dark. He was the oldest of his siblings so he had a lot of responsibility. It was because of his being the oldest that he had to make sure that he was a good model for his sisters and brothers, since Dad left when he was seven years old. His mother was not alone in raising them. The people in the community really and truly did believe that they all had a responsibility in raising them.

The belief that influences the way he conducts himself personally and professionally can be summed up by saying that he treats everybody the way he wants to be treated. That's something that he works extremely hard at accomplishing. This past year his district cut nearly \$11 million out of their budget and did not lay anyone off! He did not want to tell anyone in May that they would not have a job next year or go through the process of finding enough money when hiring the people back. At this point the damage has already been done and the stress has already been there. To avoid the layoff/re-hiring process, he told his staff that they were going to move people around,

but were not going to lay off anyone. So many people were thankful because they knew that the surrounding districts were laying off people..

He was very adamant about not letting his personal life interfere with his professional life. He's been fortunate to have his family understand what is involved in the superintendency. However, he also made it a point to attend all of his kids' activities. He also made sure that his board understood this also. It was clear that he was going to make each one of his sons high school games as long as they were playing on that team. Those superintendents that had issues with their children were the ones who made the job a priority rather than the family a priority.

The Primal Superintendent felt that the role of a good superintendent is a good delegator. His belief is when you delegate; you allow your staff to do the work without disengaging them from whatever it is they are working on. He finds the time to attend the curriculum meetings, principal's meetings, other school meetings. He listens to what is on their agendas and he is always on the agenda to answer any questions. Even though he delegates responsibility, he still has to manage it. Part of his success and longevity has been the ability to manage change. He could tell you what is going on in all of the departments within the organization, because he makes it his duty to stay informed and up to speed on what's going on.

Establishing a successful learning environment for the district involves making staff developments nonnegotiable. Everyone who is hired by the district has to go through staff developments. For example, if you are an administrator, you get a toolkit. That toolkit has in it every book study that the district has done. These books are

required readings. During the general staff meetings, presentations are done on the books that were assigned to be read. Another technique used to help gain success for the district is called Climbing Mount Everest. He explained it to me by saying:

At the top of Mount Everest is exemplary, and we take every school and their scores and we put them up at convocation. We show where they are on the ascent to the top of Mount Everest. When we get a whole bunch of folks up there at the top, this means that we've accomplished what we want to accomplish. It starts at the beginning of the year, and folks celebrate being at the top and those that are not, are sitting there trying to figure out what they have to do.

This superintendent places a lot of emphasis on his principals being good instructional leaders. The principals are responsible for making sure that they have the right teachers in the right spots and doing exactly what they're supposed to be doing, and that is moving a child from the first day of school at the beginning of the school year until the last day of school at the end of the year. These aspects make the district successful. He always stays informed so when he's out in the community and someone asks him a question, he doesn't have to turn to anybody to ask for an answer.

### **The Sustainable Superintendent's Story**

When the average superintendent stays in office approximately 3 to 5 years, it's an anomaly to find someone who has been in a district as long as this African American superintendent. He has currently been one of the longest tenured African American superintendents in the State of Texas. He has been the superintendent of a school district in east Texas for the past 16 years. For this period of longevity, I will refer to him as the

Sustainable Superintendent. His educational background consists of earning his Bachelor of Science degree from Texas A& I University (currently called Texas A&M-Kingsville), his superintendent's certificate from Texas Tech and his Doctorate of Education from Texas Southern University.

If I were interested in becoming the world's best athlete, I would try to talk with that person to get an idea of what it is like to be ranked #1. If I wanted to be the CEO of the #1 ranked fortune 500 Company, I would desire to talk with that person to understand his path to the top. If I wanted to be President of the United States, I would want to talk with Mr. Barack Obama. Since I am in education and this dissertation is about African American male superintendents, I definitely wanted to have an interview with the superintendent who is considered to be "numero uno" among African American superintendents.

As usual I arrived at this interview early just as I had done on all of my previous interviews. When I walked into the administrative building, my eyes were immediately drawn to a floor to ceiling picture that captured the Sustainable Superintendent shaking hands with President Barack Obama in the East Room of the European Americans House. This was a breath taking photo! It must have been 6' tall x 8' feet wide. Trying to turn my attention back to the receptionist and regain my calm demeanor, I calmly asked her to direct me to his office because I was scheduled to interview him as a part of my doctoral research. She kindly pointed me in the direction of his office. My first stop was to the restroom to make sure my tie had a perfect knot and that I looked like I meant business. I turned the corner from the receptionist desk and I was faced with walking

down this long hallway that was approximately 40 yards long. The floors of the building reminded me of floors in a hospital because they were spotless and gave off a reflection that resembled looking in a mirror. As I walked down the hall I passed by the offices for all of the assistant superintendents. When I finally reached the superintendent's wing of the administration building, I was greeted by three African American female secretaries. I instinctively approached the desk of the one that was closest to the doors that I entered through. When she spoke, I immediately felt like I had known her for years. She was the lady that I spoke with each time I called to schedule the interview. Both of us were happy to finally match faces with the voices.

I was there before the superintendent's arrival to work, so the secretary asked me to have a seat in the waiting area. I sat down in one of the two blue Queen Anne high back chairs. I positioned myself so that I was sitting facing the middle of the hallway in which I had just walked down so that I could get a look at the superintendent and know that he was approaching. Approximately 10 minutes prior to the scheduled interview, I kept my eyes fixated on that long hallway hoping to see him before he saw me and then all of a sudden, he entered through a door that was behind me and said, "Good morning Mr. Smothers." I almost asked him where he came from but I did not want to waste any of his time. As I stood up to shake his hand, I realized that he was an extremely tall, towering figure. He was at least 6 feet, 6 inches tall!

As he proceeds to start telling me about himself, he mentions that besides being the superintendent of this east Texas school district for 17 years he spent 7 prior years in a school district outside of Houston. He has completed 43 years in education and he

looking forward to retirement in January. He was happy to express some of the accolades that his district has received such awards as being named one of the Top 10 School Districts in America by *Business Review* and *The Houston Chronicle* selected them as one of the Top 100 Workplaces. His trail to the superintendency has been through secondary schools. He taught five years in high school, spent five years as an assistant principal, and then became a high school principal.

One of the significant personal qualities that he felt is necessary for leadership is competitiveness. By being a competitor you want your kids to be the best. He went to college on a football scholarship and has always been very competitive. He took that competitive philosophy from the field to the classroom by wanting to teach kids to be competitive on a global society. He went on to say:

In athletics, there are no excuses, there are just results. You do what you can do to win and teach kids to be winners. You can't make excuses to win. Did you do this? Did you do that? Teaching our student that you have to be winners and that you've got to compete even when odds are against you.

One of his strong qualities is being able to motivate people. He believes in re-teach and repeat which probably stems from his athletic background. Athletics is repetition and more repetition makes things happen without thinking about the next play. Repetition makes the task instinctive. Telling a person one time to do something doesn't necessarily get it done so you have to lay out expectations and then you should check later to make sure it's being done. He stressed that you have to find out if a person knows or doesn't know.

His choice of becoming a superintendent was not something that he had set out to do. He said it was all a matter of luck. He defined luck as the point in which preparation meets opportunity. If you are not prepared and opportunity comes, then you are not going to be successful. He started his career being a teacher/coach and he would always demand excellence from his students and players. This caught the attention of administrators and they wanted to make him an assistant principal. In his new position, he stressed to teachers that in order to control your classes, you have to make home visits sometimes. The teachers had to get to know the parents. He discovered that the parents who had kids were in trouble themselves when they were in school and often felt intimidated with the school atmosphere. When these parents saw that the teachers were trying to work with their kids, they responded differently. The kids respond differently when they know people love them and loving them means discipline.

His thoughts on upbringing were that you were expected to do what you were supposed to do when you were supposed to do it and there was no excuse for not doing it. He understood that from day one about life; that there are expectations. These expectations flowed over into his becoming a benevolent leader. It is okay to expect a lot, but you are also trying to uplift people, especially the African American leader. The topic of conducting himself personally and professionally led him to state the following:

It doesn't do any good just to be an African American leader as long as you're going to sit around saying, "Well man, I'm the only Black, I'm the first Black."

We don't need them kind of Negroes. That's why I'm retiring. I'm the first Black

superintendent in this school district and the only Black that's ever been so I need to retire so I won't be the only one.

In order to have successful learning environments for his district, he believes it must start with principals being strong leaders. He felt that most research on effective schools shows that it is the adults who determine what happens in a school. The leader in the school is the principal. Leadership is crucial in turning things around. This Sustained Superintendent strongly emphasized that he has never seen a great school with a sorry principal. If you have a great school, you have a great principal.

### **Analysis of Findings**

As the lives of these superintendents in this study unfolded, several themes emerged that provided a common link. Although, there were many challenges mentioned by all the superintendents in my study, there were just as many rewards. Therefore, the following major themes were identified; (1) strong parental influences; (2) athlete/teacher/coach; (3) visibility in community; and (4) educated during Civil Rights Era. The superintendents believed they gained their focus on education by having strong parental influences. They each believed that their involvement in sports helped them to sharpen their leadership skills at an early age. The superintendents also believed that being visible in the community has helped to garner support from all stakeholders. Being educated during the Civil Rights Era taught the superintendents a lot about equity issues.

### **Strong Parental Influence**

Each of the participants in my study stated their upbringing and educational career facilitated their opportunity to become a superintendent. The Equitable,



Indigenous, Sustainable, and Executive Superintendents came from a two-parent home, while the Primal Superintendent came from a single parent home in which he served as the caretaker for his younger siblings while his mother worked. Even though each had different childhood upbringings and traveled along different developmental pathways, it was proven at an early age that each was determined to be successful and to have a positive impact on the lives of others throughout their years in education.

During their childhood, the participants were taught the importance of work. The Equitable Superintendent shared that he grew up in a home where character and value meant something. His mother coached and supported the family into the mentality of always trying to help other people. She asked him on a daily basis if he had done something good for someone and he has maintained that attitude.

The Indigenous Superintendent was brought up by parents who were not educated, but engraved in children's minds that they were just as good as anybody despite not having all of the extras that other families may have had. That advice from his parents resounds throughout his leadership today. He tries to instill this in all of the students in his small school district.

The Executive Superintendent grew up in a very poor family with his dad being an alcoholic. He had to deal with those sociological issues and learn survival skills. He was tired of the way school was being done and sought out how to do things differently. He discovered that students were not learning as much in school once they left kindergarten. He taught in ways that made learning fun and memorable for students. He felt that if he did this, the concept being taught would remain with the student

throughout his educational career. I know that I can still recall some of the methods that my teachers taught me to remember things and I have not forgotten them up until this day! They have definitely been embedded in my long term memory.

The Primal Superintendent grew up in single parent home. His mother worked as a maid and since he was the oldest child, he worked in the cotton fields to picking cotton, chopping cotton, bailing hay, and hauling hay. These experiences taught him to have a good work ethic. He left home in the dark and returned home in the dark. He made sure that he was a good role model for his siblings and he still models the behavior he wants to see through his role as superintendent in his district.

The Sustainable Superintendent was always brought up to not make excuses. If he was told to do something by his parents, he was expected to carry out the task. He developed this winning attitude early in life and it is definitely one of the driving forces behind his leadership style today. Everyone can be and everyone is a winner!

#### *Strong Parents for Their Children*

Specifically, the Equitable Superintendent's upbringing stressed the importance of having values and character. Treating people right, fair, and being honest in all you do weighed heavily on the choices he made in childhood as well as the choices he makes today in adulthood. When he was awarded a basketball scholarship after high school and became the first African American basketball player to play on the Texas State University team, his coaches lacked confidence in his academic ability but not in his athletic ability. He was relentless in graduating with a major in physical education and with a minor in government. The Indigenous Superintendent was also relentless.

Regardless of the fact that both of his parents were not educated, they stressed to him and his siblings that they were just as good as anyone. The Executive Superintendent had to deal with the fact that he was brought up by a loving mother and an alcoholic father who left him with a lot of emotional and psychological scarring. He had an undying strength to persevere out of his home situation. Becoming an avid reader of the Bible and being able to apply its lessons to his life has made a difference. The Primal Superintendent clearly understood what it meant to be relentless. Being raised by a single parent and wearing the hat of the oldest of his siblings, he knew that a day would come when he did not have to go to the cotton fields or bail hay. However, the work ethic of sunrise to sunset has followed him throughout his career and has definitely made a difference in his life. The Sustainable Superintendent was brought up in an atmosphere where making excuses was not allowed. He took that competitiveness from the football field to his professional career and it has made a huge statement in why he has a winning mentality. All but one of my participants was reared in a two-parent home. Nevertheless, as young boys, each was taught the importance of hard work. The Equitable Superintendent was taught to be responsible in the community as well as on the basketball court. The Indigenous Superintendent was inspired by his parents to go out and carve his own paths in life. The Executive Superintendent always believed that God definitely had His hands on his life. The Primal Superintendent had to go to work at a young age, simply because his father was not around. He took on the responsibilities of helping his mother provide for her younger siblings. Hence, each superintendent's childhood was different, yet was

proven through their relentlessness that they were determined to succeed and have a positive, impact on the lives of others.

### *Developed Leadership and Mentorship*

The superintendents felt that the style of leadership that worked best was one of extensiveness as they made relationships with others vital to all actions; placed a major focus on not only building a strong school district, but building community through active participation; empowering others to improve their skills, and maintaining open communication. As a result, their decision making styles stressed cooperation, and ongoing professional development.

Each of the five superintendents led with an authentic love for the students of their respective district and a belief that they were responsible for taking care of the educational needs of their students, teachers, and administrators all the while considering the needs of the parents and community. Their leadership styles included being supportive, organized, empathetic, sensitive to the needs of others, having good listening skills, and an ability to effectively communicate with others.

The Equitable Superintendent recalled that when he was in Birmingham, he inherited a school district with 78 of the schools being labeled as being on the “bad list.” Through his leadership some schools had to close due to deplorable conditions. After the school closures and re-zoning that left him with 31 schools on the “bad list.” By the end of his four and half years as superintendent in Birmingham, there were no schools on that list. He brought this same leadership to Texas where the school district he was chosen to lead was under state takeover. He communicated with the board,

communicated with the community, held public forums to discuss what things were right, which things were not so right, and what needed to be done cooperatively to make things happen. The Equitable Superintendent stated, “The facilities were in bad shape. It was like a third world country.” He quickly put in place resources, worked cooperatively with the city and the state to come up with a \$300 million bond program. This was a community that had not seen a school built in over 30 years. The way he came up with the money was through the city’s waterworks program. They took the interest off the taxes the city gained and put that money into the schools. Through this process, they were not only able to build that new high school, but they built new elementary schools, and were able to renovate every school in the district including the administration building in which I conducted my interview.

The Primal Superintendent practiced effective leadership by modeling the behavior he wanted to see among his top leaders. His sense of efficacy as a superintendent revealed through his acts of guidance and motivation, demonstrated he could make a difference in the administrative team of each campus as they worked together to achieve student academic success.

His act of leadership through guidance and motivation also provided a sense of empowerment for his campus administrators to take charge of any situation they were faced with. Through this empowerment, the campus administrators were given the power to act and grow while enhancing their strength, creativity, and competence. Hence, empowering others apparently was not threatening to any of the African American male superintendents in this study.

Making available the necessary tools so campus administrators could be successful in their leadership was considered to be critically important to each of the men in my study. The Primal Superintendent sat down with each of the faculty and staff members of his district to listen to what they had to say. The Equitable Superintendent made sure that he was present at as many district wide school events as possible so that all of the students knew their superintendent. These men modeled soldier like characteristics. They were always ready, willing, and able to stand, protect and provide for their district. Regardless of the battle, these men proved their ability to stand on the front line for what was important, even if it meant sometimes having to stand alone. Confidence in their ability to lead effectively was also a soldier like quality they displayed. Each superintendent was confident that their campus leaders would support their teachers and work toward the common goal of student academic success. As a final point, providing for the needs of others could be attributed to ways of leading as they felt the need to be supportive toward their campus administrators.

### **Athlete/Teacher/Coach**

Four out of the five superintendents grew up participating competitively in sports during their youth. The Equitable Superintendent was a basketball player that used his on the court talent as a method of paying for his education. After graduating from college he began his career in education by becoming a social studies teacher and coach. At the start of his coaching career, he was one of the youngest head basketball coaches in Texas. The Indigenous Superintendent was an extremely good football player. He let his athletic talent pay for his education also. After college, his first job was that of a

football coach and teacher. The Primal Superintendent was a football player in high school. After graduating from college, he began his career as a high school teacher and coach. The Primal Superintendent earned an athletic scholarship to play football. He started teaching and coaching. He was always very competitive as a player and as a teacher/coach. It has been a lifelong journey for him to make sure that the students in his district have all that they need to compete in a global society. Since then

#### *Mentoring and Mentoring Programs in their Districts*

Mentoring also helped these African American men achieve a relentless focus when facing issues, problems, or making decisions as a leader in education. Each superintendent in my study expressed that he had someone in his corner to give him advice in making important decisions or there was someone he looked upon as a role model.

The Equitable Superintendent mentioned Dr. Linda Darling-Hammond in his interview. He stated:

Linda Darling-Hammond, by the way, is one of my true giants and friends. She is a Professor at Stanford University whose book, *The Right to Learn*, is one that I have been heavily influenced by. In fact, I knew her—we had conversations even while she was writing the book. It took her about ten years to write the book, but her work exemplifies and characterizes the work I try to do. I guess my thinking about the importance of doing the right thing with children, making sure resources are equitable, the quality of teaching is equitable, and access to information and resources. When children have the information and they have

excellent teachers; they perform.

When the Indigenous Superintendent held his first administrative position, he was encouraged by a European American female. She asked him if she could come to the campus and talk with him. She said, "I found out that you wanted to be the athletic director, but your name wasn't brought to us." Furthermore she said, "You've seen a lot of superintendents come and a lot of superintendents go, and you're probably going to see some more. Don't leave. You make a difference with all the kids." Through this dialogue, the Indigenous Superintendent decided not to give up but to keep pressing on in the pursuit of his goal. After that conversation, a year later, he was chosen as an assistant principal; and then about six years later, he became a high school principal. His interpretation to those turn of events forever changed his life:

So where I wanted to go is not where God wanted me to go. He put me where He wanted me to be. So sometimes we set our target here and He has something more for us. That was a life story that I look back and reflect on the fact that I could have gotten upset and left and would not have tasted some of the fruits of my labor. I would have left out of pride, but I was able to withstand that and put my pride aside. And now the rest is history.

The Executive Superintendent had is own take on how people have helped to guide him to where he is in life:

Have what I refer to as a board of trustees in your life which is just three or four folk you believe love you and care about you and who don't make a move without talking to those three or four people. You trust them as your board of



trustees, and you make life decisions in consultation with those folks. Sometimes they have to tell you something that is not good for you or when you shouldn't do something. I think there is wisdom in experience. I grew up a kid who valued being around old people. When I started preaching, the preacher I looked up to was 50 years my senior. I was his son and whatever he told me to do, I did it. So I grew up believing in the wisdom of people who have trodden the path before me. I have four or five people in my life that I don't turn right or left without talking to them because it helps me not make stupid decisions.

A former superintendent of the district in which the Primal Superintendent was hired in for his first teaching assignment had a lot to do with his ascension from the classroom to the office of superintendent. After receiving his doctorate he wanted to teach on the college level and he applied for a job opening in administration. One of the professors asked him, "How are you going to be able to supervise administrators and you've never been an administrator?" That statement made a lot of sense to him so he accepted a teaching position. Within approximately two years he applied for an assistant principal position and he got it. The very next year he was tapped to supervise three other assistant principals because he did a good job. One day while doing bus duty, the superintendent asked him if he would be interested in applying for a principal job at the local junior high school. He applied and got that position also. The superintendent also gave him information on the fact that he knew the assistant superintendent would be retiring within the next two years and encouraged him to apply for that position as well. As previously noted, he applied for this position and got it also. Now he was in central

office as one of the assistant superintendents. After the district had won many awards for its academic achievement of its schools, he got the call asking him if he would have any interest in being the superintendent since the incumbent superintendent was retiring. As successful as he was with being named to all of the other positions, he was successful at being the district's new superintendent. In hind sight, he saw that this superintendent had helped guide him from a classroom teacher to the superintendent of the district!

The Sustainable Superintendent did not set out to be a superintendent. The principal at his first teaching assignment; which lasted for five years, took notice of how well he taught and had excellent classroom discipline. The building principal called him to his office and wanted to make him assistant principal. He then spent approximately five years as an assistant principal and then he went to become a junior high principal, a high school principal, and then to central office as one of the assistant superintendents.

### **Visibility in Community**

Research suggests that being a visible presence in the school district is very effective (Coleman, Mikkelson, & LaRocque, 1991). The superintendent who makes being a visible presence a priority in his district will secure the respect of his employees, and he will be a cornerstone of the overall success of his school district. This visibility provides them with first-hand knowledge about the school district as well as providing them with opportunities for them to have a positive impact on those actions. The Equitable Superintendent adamantly expressed his concern for being visible throughout the school district. He recanted,

I go to athletic events because I want the children to know who their superintendent is. I didn't ever meet my superintendent, but I want to rub shoulders with everyone in the district. I want the teachers and the students to have access to me directly.

The Indigenous Superintendent wanted to be more visible but he gets bogged down with running the day to day operations of the district. He looked at me strongly and said;

I should be out there right now finding out what's going on in the district, the community, surrounding communities, and whether dynamics in Houston is going to impact us 10 to 12 years down the road. I spend too much time here (his office) trying to find out what is taking place on the state scene to make sure that we don't get blindsided by things that's coming down the pipe.

The Executive Superintendent had no problem with being visible. He gets a lot of visibility through being in the ministry. He is seen from two platforms: behind the pulpit and behind the superintendent desk. The Primal Superintendent knows that the eye of the public is always on him. One of the first things he did upon being chosen as superintendent was to go out and have face to face meetings with each employer in the district and to be present at as many community functions as possible. Growing up, the Sustainable Superintendent seemed to always be the tallest person in the room. With that characteristic, he always seemed to garner the most attention as he grew up. Now that he is the superintendent, little has changed. In his office, he has a wall size picture of him

and President Obama shaking hands and talking at one of the European Americans House luncheons.

### *Community Involvement*

The key to having a good relationship with all stakeholders is being involved in the community. This was something that all of the superintendents agreed to. The Equitable superintendent knew that if he was going to lobby for having the first high school built in the district in over 30 years, he would have to have good communication between all stakeholders of the district. The Indigenous Superintendent relied on community involvement to raise one of the campuses from low performing to exemplary to a national Blue Ribbon finalist with basically the same teachers. Community involvement for the Executive Superintendent came to him as second nature. Because of his being in the ministry, he was familiar with relating God's word to all people on all levels. He took this philosophy from behind the pulpit and continued it in the educational leadership arena. The Primal Superintendent feels his best way to get involved with the community was nonverbally. He gave the impression that "talk is cheap." This superintendent felt that modeling the behavior you want to see among your leadership is better than talking about it verbally. The Sustainable Superintendent felt as though his community involvement has been the key to his longevity. Having interpersonal skills; friendly, concerned, and the willingness to talk to people and visit people from all walks of life regardless of ethnicity or educational level.

In order to finance construction projects, school district sells bonds to investors who will be paid principal and interest (Bonds 101, n.d.). Bonds for school projects are

very similar to a mortgage on a home. The sale of these bonds begins with an election to authorize a specific amount. This amount is usually the maximum the district is allowed to sell without another election. Next, the school district sells them on an “as needed” basis for capital projects-usually one or twice a year. Interested buyers take the bids and are sold at the lowest interest rate offered.

The superintendents in this study have been proposing and passing bonds in order to meet the constant changing landscape of their respective district. The Equitable Superintendent successfully led a proposal and passing of a \$189.5 million dollar bond in 2009 for land purchases, renovations to existing campuses, two new schools, and transportation upgrades. The Indigenous Superintendent proposed and passed a \$65 million dollar bond issue for a new high school, early childhood center, bus barn, field house, baseball diamond, tennis courts, and repair of numerous buildings. The Primal Superintendent led the charge for the passage of a \$281.1 million dollar bond issue to build six new schools, support facilities, and renovations and additions to existing campuses. The Executive Superintendent spearheaded a \$280 million dollar bond issue in 2007 to construct six new schools along with additions and renovations to twenty schools within his school district. The Sustainable Superintendent directed a \$388.5 million dollar bond issue in 2007 to build nine new elementary schools, one middle school, a multipurpose athletic complex, and renovations and additions to other facilities within the district.

## **Educated During Civil Rights Era**

Collectively, one of the characteristics the five superintendents had in common has been the fact that they were educated during the Civil Rights Era. This led them to have a strong leader identity and persona that helped them to make important decisions about their lives based on each individual's personal history. Each of these men were faced with tough challenges at the beginning of their educational career that has helped them to reach the position that they have today.

The Equitable Superintendent was faced with a choice early in his college career as to which educational field he would pursue. Being the first African American athlete at Texas State University (formally known as Southwest Texas State University), he wanted to initially major in law. However, his coaches encouraged him to major in physical education thinking that it would be easier for him to graduate. He took this as a challenge because his coaches felt as that he lacked confidence academically and could not do the work in government. So this superintendent decided to major in physical education and minor in government and political science! After earning his bachelor's degree, he then pursued and earned his master's degree and doctoral degrees.

The Indigenous Superintendent had a lot of offers to do many things after high school, but chose to play basketball as a way of getting out of the cycle of not doing anything after graduating from high school. He did not want to be one of the guys loitering on the street corner as did many other young African American men he knew. He was considered by other people's standards, to be an extremely good athlete. He

decided to take advantage of being offered an athletic scholarship as ways of helping him earn his college degree and to help break the cycle.

The Executive Superintendent felt his leader breakthrough during the Civil Right Era came through his calling to the ministry. After going off to college to study religion and ministry and earning his associate's degree, he needed something to supplement his income and decided to substitute teach. His first substitute teaching position changed his outlook on the field of education and felt as though he could do great work in the profession. He continued his education by earning a bachelor's, masters and doctoral degree.

The Primal Superintendent was involved in athletics as well and based his leader identity and persona manifesting itself early in his athletic career. Using his athletic scholarship as means of paying for his education, he knew that he wanted to be able to help others get an education also. He felt that his leader identity and persona was birthed out of the ability to be a good follower. After becoming a superintendent, he has always made a conscious effort to model the type of behavior he wants to see within his school district.

The Sustainable Superintendent was always the tallest kid in his class. His height put him in a leadership role very early in his childhood. This role immediately made him the person that everyone would turn to for direction, motivation, and leadership. Being very competitive, he always wanted to be the best so that meant that you have to work harder and longer. This greatly impacted his leader identity and persona.

### *Supporter of Equity Issues*

The Equitable Superintendent got his pseudonym because he believed in being a leader for human civil rights through education. The Indigenous Superintendent is always aware and concerned about equity issues. He believed that any school district, regardless of ethnicity can be competitive as long as they are given the same tools to work with in order to be successful. The Executive Superintendent believes that as a moral leader; it's about beliefs. It's about visioning. It's about making and inspiring people to want to do something big in their lives. The Primal Superintendent gave all employees of the district an opportunity to meet with him. He wanted to hear the "needs" as well as the "wants" of the district and to devise a plan to making the playing ground level for all participants. The Sustainable Superintendent felt that the bottom line was to create an atmosphere within the district where everybody can compete fairly. He also stated that you have to be willing to commit to people, uplift them, and realize that some people need more help than others to achieve success.

### **Summary**

All of the superintendents in the study believed that their parents had a direct effect on their character, which has had a direct effect on their leadership styles. They were all glad to have parent(s) who cared and considered education to be important. Each superintendent believes that because education was a major centerpiece in their upbringing, they make sure they demonstrate the same concern for their districts. Their faith in God has helped them to persevere through tough times as well as having people in their corner to help guide them.



Each participant believed that in order for their districts to be successful, there has to be other success stories within their districts to serve as examples. They believed in empowering others to be successful whether it was through leading by example, directives, staff developments, or through book studies.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Introduction

I would like, at this point, to review where I started with my study, and how it has evolved. I set out on this journey to conduct a qualitative research study, examining and (re) interpreting (Dillard, 1995) the voices of five African American male superintendents in diverse school districts. More specifically, through discourse, the purpose of the study was to determine the constructed meanings of their personal and professional acts of leading, as related to experiencing success in diverse school districts. Recognizing that the participants in this study had various realities, I chose qualitative methodology in an attempt to understand the meaning they assigned to their experiences. I understood that the knower and the known were undividable and the researcher and participants would influence each other.

In an attempt to understand the life experiences and leadership practices of those four administrators, I began with these research questions as guides:

1. How do African American male superintendents describe their personal characteristics related to success in their urban school district?
2. How do the selected African American male superintendents exercise and interpret their acts of leadership?
3. What are these African American male superintendent's perceptions about leadership related to student academic achievement in their diverse school district?

I investigated these questions through in-depth, open-ended interviews and semi-structured face-to-face interviews with the five superintendents. I also investigated the questions through the collection of data received from observations of the superintendents, audiotapes, non-verbal cues, and recorded field notes. As I collected data and had the data transcribed, I compared them with each other's data and put them into categories, using note cards and number coding.

I examined the literature I felt would be relevant to the study of African American male superintendent's leadership. I investigated leader persona and individual identity, Critical Race Theory, African American male leaders in education, historical perspectives on African American superintendents, and personal characteristics of a successful superintendent. My study revealed that obtaining a position in administration was more challenging for African American men than their European American counterpart.

I also looked at effective educational leadership. Many researchers along with Thomas (2003) expressed that effective superintendents exemplified the qualities of clear vision, strong leadership, relentless focus, political acuity, and personal accountability.

In addition, I considered the role of the superintendent. One of the greatest challenges for superintendents is to make visible and rapid movements in the academic achievement of our nation's most susceptible children. His role may also require him to unite parents, educators, school boards, and community leaders behind a clear and coherent vision of instructional purpose.

## **Summary**

As the results of the study are presented, the guiding questions serve as a focal point of the research. The personal characteristics which attributed to the African American male superintendents' success in a successful diverse school district were discussed in the next section (see chapter 4 for greater details). The African American males exercised many forms of leading but shared a commonality of utilizing a model of inclusiveness where both the superintendent and the campus administrators participated in the decision-making process.

Recognizing and appreciating diversity among each campus within the district was not an option. Similarly, to enhance the academic performance of each campus, the superintendent sponsored book studies as mandatory staff developments to teach the principals, and then for the principals to teach his staff about how to address different learning styles and individual needs. Therefore, culturally responsive leadership was characteristic of leaders in my study in their attempts to successfully lead their diverse school districts toward academic success.

## **Personal Characteristics**

The first research question asked, "How do African American Superintendents describe their personal characteristics related to success in their diverse school district?" These personal characteristics that emerged included high expectations for students; possessing strong people skills; open communication; and being highly organized and flexible. Unanimously, each of the African American male superintendents demonstrated the character of perseverance throughout his leadership role as superintendent.

The Equitable Superintendent had a former professor who recommended him for jobs in Georgia. The Indigenous Superintendent had someone to ask him to apply for the job in his school district. The Executive Superintendent always had men who were in higher positions to recommend him for the next job. The Primal Superintendent was courted by other superintendents who felt that he was doing great as a principal, but felt he could do better as a superintendent. The Sustainable Superintendent was asked by his superiors to keep advancing on his job. All of these men were on a fast track from teacher to superintendent due to the people who stood in their corner and gave them direction and advice. This is why one of my participants felt that people need to have a “board of trustees” in their lives to help them make sound, reasonable decisions. This “board of trustees” should only consist of three to four members who will have your best interest at heart and will prevent you from making stupid life decisions. Even though the men who helped to influence the lives of the African American male superintendents in my study have retired, they still remain in touch with them. Wisdom is always essential and it influenced their effectiveness as a superintendent. All of the superintendents in my study had someone in their corner that helped them to make decisions about the job choices they made in their profession.

### **Acts of Leadership**

The second research question asked, “How do selected African American male superintendents exercise and interpret their acts of leadership?” The men in this study practiced many forms of leading that was consistent with the research. Business and educational institutions use formulas and different approaches to interpret their

leadership. Curry (2000) proposed that effective leaders are not found in formulas or strategies, but instead are connected within an individual's development of becoming. In addition to this, their relationships with others were vital. Their decision making style stressed cooperation, communication, and modeling which helped to facilitate a translation of their educational visions into success for their district.

Specifically, the Equitable Superintendent led with the belief that everyone deserves the right to be successful and to be happy. He firmly believed that when people have an opportunity, they want to be successful, and they are successful when they get the tools, resources, and the support to be successful. He also desired to be a leader that is always visible. Reflecting on his own formal education, he never had the chance to meet his superintendent so now he wants the student of his district to know who he is. He wants the teachers and students to have access to him directly. I was surprised that when I contacted him for the initial interview that he returned my call on his cell phone and at the end of our conversation he gave me his cell phone number to contact him directly. I was expecting to schedule my meeting with him through his secretary but he allowed me to have direct access to him. Now I understand what he means by wanting to be accessible to everyone. The Indigenous Superintendent felt that his leadership role was more of a watchdog. Even though he had the desire to be more visible in the community and in the schools among the staff, faculty, and students, he felt as though he spent too much time trying to find out what was occurring on the state level that might adversely affect his school district. The Executive Superintendent got his training in church about leadership. He was influenced by reading about biblical leaders. His

leadership style can be described as executive – getting things done through others. Through this leadership style, he devotes a lot of his time to people development. His greatest strength is having the ability to rally people around a call; to make people want to improve something; make it better than it is and really contribute to something that is bigger than who we are or bigger than the time and space in which we live on the planet. The Primal Superintendent stance on leadership is that you have got to be willing to allow other people to do their work. He feels that if he is a good leader, most people will feel like he is not going to ask them to do anything that he would not do. From an athletic background as a child, the Sustainable Superintendent looks at his leadership as being competitive. He wants his school district to be the best in the state. Being able to motivate people has been leadership strength for him. He is a believer in re-teach, repeat, repeat and students to be the best.

### **Perception of Leading toward Academic Achievement**

The third research question was, “What are these African American male superintendent’s perceptions about leadership related to student academic achievement in their diverse school district?” As society continues to progress, superintendents as instructional leaders must acknowledge their ethical and moral responsibilities in leading diverse school districts toward student academic achievement. These African American male superintendents perceived their leadership to be one that gives voice to vision. Additionally they exercised their voice to empower everyone in their district to discover their own skills and abilities. The academic achievement on the student level was a result of effective teaching practices exercised by exemplary teachers. In particular, the

Indigenous Superintendent made it clear that in order to obtain high academic achievement; we must learn to reach if we are going to teach.

## **Conclusion**

Personal characteristics, acts of leadership, and perceptions of leading toward academic achievement for all students were the components demonstrated by these district leaders. Although it is not a generalized formula, it proved to be a sound base and a successful combination for these superintendents. The type of success demonstrated and attained by these superintendents required an individual to be focused, dedicated, and confident in meeting the needs of the district.

The African American men in this study were exceptional men who successfully led in positions generally held by their European American male counterparts. One purpose for embarking on this research was to describe the leadership behaviors of African American male superintendents in diverse school districts. What was revealed was that these five men practiced many forms of leadership. They defined themselves by their positions as educational leaders who have devoted their lives to providing a quality education for their students. They were also able to articulate their vision to their district and empower them to lead. The superintendents felt the style of leadership that worked best in today's society was one of inclusiveness.

As I reflected on the interview process, I began to type their response. In so doing, I found myself remembering the actual moment these superintendents shared their stories as if I could see their faces on the screen as I typed. The words and expression used to portray their thoughts and ideas were more than just simple written text



representing their verbal thoughts. These words were packed with emotions and feelings and consequently were a printed form of the lives and realities of these African American male leaders.

The main focus on their stories is that superintendents are there to ensure a quality education for students. To accomplish this, the superintendents insist that principals believe and care about each student, and develop policies and procedures of the district that are inclusive and supportive. These participants' stories revealed they had a desire to bond with all district employees on a caring level and to establish an atmosphere of mutual respect and concern. Their stories revealed their having good work ethic for themselves and a relentlessness to bounce back during difficult times. They promoted staff through shared-decision making processes and staff members were empowered to use their knowledge toward professional growth. Additionally, they were strategic to make decisions with genuine care and concern for all those involved. These superintendents' stories also revealed strong leadership characteristics that included being empathetic and supportive; possessing strong people skills and having open communication; empowering with superintendent efficacy; being organized and flexible; and considering themselves to be "advocates" for the children in their district. Fair and impartial treatments toward all employees of the district were also strong values held by these male leaders. It was believed that fairness toward everyone had a great impact on the perception of others relative to how well they led their districts.

The similarities and differences of each participant's experiences produced volumes of written and verbal contexts. Each of these superintendents served as an

inspiration to me because they were dedicated, humble, caring, and talented African American male leaders in educational administration. Their voices spoke of wisdom, endurance, motivation, pride, humility and an overwhelming sense of confidence in themselves and their schools. Throughout the interviews, I realized that I, too, have traveled some of the earlier paths taken at the beginning of their careers. I realized we shared characteristics of relentlessness, perseverance, caring, and a sense of efficacy. Most importantly, I discovered like all of my participants, that I have faith in God and need His direction to order my steps. Similar to the Executive Superintendent and the Primal Superintendent, God took us all on different paths to get where we are now. None of us chose education as our first choice to have as a professional career. But we wholeheartedly decided to give the direction of our lives over to God and move out of the way of His plan that was ordained for us since birth.

Researchers pinpoint many factors that can be involved in a person's life to determine their individual success or failure. Some of those factors include living in high crime neighborhoods (Felsman & Vaillant, 1987), divorce (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980), poverty (Luthar, 1991), parental substance abuse (Werner, 1993) and a discordant home and family life (Werner, 1993).for an individual's failure and success. Wolkow and Ferguson (2001) use the term "survivors" to refer to individuals with favorable life outcomes despite considerable hardship during their development. These individuals have identified teachers, members of clergy, older siblings, aunts, uncles, and neighbors among others that have been sources of support. The Equitable Superintendent was resilient due to the fact that he grew up during the height of integration where he was

one of the first African American athletes to play at Southwest Texas State University. During those times it was very difficult for him to play in arenas where he was often the unfair recipient of racial slurs and the object of other people's hatred. The Indigenous Superintendent had a veteran teacher in his corner when he began his teaching career. That teacher saw in him the potential for being a good leader and made sure that he was guided through the path of becoming a successful leader not only from a coach/teacher, but also as an administrator. The Executive Superintendent was brought up in a home in which his father was an alcoholic. He trusted the "call on his life" to lead him into the ministry and become a successful educator. The Primal Superintendent was forced into the role of being the man of the house while still trying to figure out how to become a little boy. The fact that his father left their family at an early age caused him to step into the role of being the bread winner to help support his mother and other siblings. He did everything from chopping cotton and picking cotton to bailing and hauling hay to earn wages. The Sustainable Superintendent's family believed in discipline. He was always expected to do his chores when it was time to do them and to not come up with an excuse for not completing those chores. This early influence by his family led him to have a no-nonsense, no excuse approach to getting things done.

### **Recommendations**

The following are recommendations based on the findings of this study:

1. Superintendents need strong people skills. Thus professional development with a concentration on public relations and building learning communities would be beneficial. The participants placed a major focus on building

community and inclusiveness through participatory styles of leadership. This community should include students, teachers, principals, parents, paraprofessionals, custodial and food service staff, bus drivers, the community, and other stakeholders. This style of leadership was found to be key in leading successfully.

2. Create mentorships and shadow-mentoring programs for both African American male superintendent candidates and practicing African American male superintendents new to the job or new to their district. Superintendent preparation programs must be continued. Develop an aggressive recruitment system to attract African American males into the superintendency preparation programs.
3. Diversity is increasing in the public school systems across the country; therefore, diversity in leadership should also be emphasized. Superintendents who are people of color may bring special insights and talents by incorporating rich and supporting climates for learning. Superintendents of color may also serve as role models for staff and students.
4. Investigate how superintendency preparation programs at the university level address race and how does race impact the recruitment and hiring of African American males and others as superintendents.
5. Research studies should be more specific in their studies on the office of the superintendency. Even though the American Association of School Administrators conducts ten year studies on the American School

Superintendent, there should be a specific category for African American.

The race/ethnic group category does not truly identify the need for African

Americans in the superintendency if it is “some category other than European

Americans.”

### **Implications for Future Research**

Based on the findings of this study the following are suggestions for further research:

1. This study was conducted with five African American male superintendents. Since the Hispanic population is the largest people of color group in the nation, it would be beneficial to replicate this study by listening to the voices of Hispanic male superintendents in a comparison study.
2. There is a vast amount of literature on women in the superintendency. However, it would be interesting to hear from the voices of more African American male superintendents. This dialogue could lead to gaining a more helpful insight on men’s perception of educational leaders’ styles of leading.
3. Simmons (2005) stated that superintendents of color faced several challenges. One is the accessibility to the position and the other is the fact that the majority of them are found in urban, problem-ridden, and low performing districts. If this is the majority, we need to hear from those superintendents that are not employed in these types of districts and what has been the secret to their success.

4. This study examined the leadership styles of current African American male superintendents in diverse school districts. It is recommended that this study be replicated using the voices of retired African American male superintendents to get an idea of their leadership styles and how they may have changed throughout the years.
5. It would be interesting to discover the similarities and differences of African American male and African American female superintendents. It is recommended to compare and contrast their views on accountability and leadership styles.

It is my belief that each of the African American male superintendents in my study will be an example to society at large as a leader who believes in equity and quality. As the country becomes more focused on educating its children, it appears that these educational leaders share in their efforts toward high academic success for all children. This study showed that superintendents make a significant difference in shaping teaching and learning as they attempt to demonstrate their personal and professional acts of leading.

Lastly, although there is valuable knowledge rooted in the stories shared by these African American male superintendents, it is my sincere hope that other superintendents will realize the stories they have created on their own. Therefore, this research will contribute to the conversations concerning superintendents that have been a part of leadership in diverse school districts.

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## APPENDIX A

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

#### African American Male Superintendents in Diverse School Districts

##### Personal Information

1. Tell me something about yourself.
2. How many years of elementary/secondary teaching experience did you have prior to becoming a superintendent?
3. How many years have you been employed as a superintendent in this district (in others)?

##### Qualities/Effectiveness

1. What do you feel are some of the significant personal qualities, values, and behaviors necessary for leadership and instructional improvement?
2. What do you think are some of your strong qualities as a leader (superintendent) that has helped you in your leadership position?
3. Please share some of the important life experiences that you have had which facilitated your choice to become a superintendent?
4. What interpersonal dynamics do you feel impacted your effectiveness as a leader? (How were you motivated toward becoming a leader in education?)
5. What role, if any, did your upbringing play on the way you lead?
6. What values, interests, goals, and beliefs influence the way you conduct yourself, personally and professionally?
7. Please describe some of the obstacles or restrictions that cause you the most concern as you try to carry out your duties as superintendent?
8. How has your personal life been affected by your decision to pursue a position in leadership?
9. Should the superintendent role be redefined and its multiple responsibilities distributed among other assistant superintendents, school administrators, and teachers?

## Interview Protocol

### African American Male Superintendents in Diverse School Districts

#### Impact of Effective Leadership

1. As superintendent, how did you go about establishing a successful learning environment for your district?
2. Please describe some of the approaches/techniques you used in gaining success for your school district?
3. From your experiences as a superintendent, name 2-3 key dimensions of leadership for sustained reform- the habits of mind and heart- that enable leaders to guide successful change over the long term. Describe these in the context of your concrete experiences as a district superintendent.
4. Generally speaking, do you think it is a good idea or a bad idea to hold school principal accountable for student standardized test scores at the building level? Why or why not?
5. How should superintendents measure the success of their district? Is high stakes testing a viable answer?
6. If superintendents play an important part in the success of their district, what are their secrets and what are the limits to their powers?

**APPENDIX B**  
**PHONE SCRIPT**

Hello, my name is Aneil Smothers. I am a doctoral student at Texas A&M University and I am conducting a study on African American male superintendents in diverse school districts. In order to get more information about this topic, I would like to interview five African American superintendents. The interview will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes and will be at a location of your choice. The risks associated in this study are minimal, and are not greater than risks ordinarily encountered in daily life.

All information gathered during the study will be confidential. I will be the only person with access to your consent form, which links your name with the subject number. Your identity will be disguised through this specific coding. In order to get exact information from you, and increase the strength of the study, you will be audio taped in the 60 to 90 minute interview session.

Your name will be pre-coded to the recording tape that will be used to record the interview session. The transcriptions (writing down from the tape what you said) will also be coded in order to further protect your confidentiality. Written reports may entail the use of quoted material. At the conclusion of this study, the information gathered and audiotapes, identifiable only by subject number, will be stored in a locked file that only I will be able to access. The information obtained from this research will be used for the publication or educational purposes of this researcher only and not for any other purpose.

If you agree to talk with me, all information will be kept confidential and you can ask questions or stop at any time during the interview. Understand that if there are any problems or questions in connection with your participation of this study, you may contact Dr. Norvella Carter, the faculty advisor for this project, at Texas A&M University at (979) 845-3211 or [ncarter@tamu.edu](mailto:ncarter@tamu.edu). This research has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University. For research related problems or questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you can contact these offices at (979) 458-4067 or [irb@tamu.edu](mailto:irb@tamu.edu).

You will be given a copy of the consent form for your records. By signing this document, you consent to participation in this study.

Do you have any further questions?

## APPENDIX C

### TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION PROGRAM

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#### CONSENT FORM

Project Title: Voices of Five African American Superintendents and Their Leadership Styles in Diverse School Districts

**You are being invited to take part in a research study being conducted by Texas A&M University. You are being asked to read this form so that you know about this research study. The information in this form is provided to help you decide whether or not to take part in the research. If you decide to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign this consent form. If you decide you do not want to participate, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefit you normally would have.**

#### **WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?**

The purpose of this study is to hear voices and the life experiences of leadership practices of five African American male superintendents in diverse school districts. The goal is to use discourse to determine the constructed meanings of their personal and professional acts of leading as it relates to diverse school districts.

#### **WHY AM I BEING ASKED TO BE IN THIS STUDY?**

You are being asked to be in this study because you are an African American male superintendent, you have served in the superintendency role for at least three or more years, you are presently serving in the capacity of superintendent and you have impacted your district's performance as a result of your leadership role.

#### **HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL BE ASKED TO BE IN THIS STUDY?**

Five people (participants) will be enrolled in this study locally.

#### **WHAT ARE THE ALTERNATIVES TO BEING IN THIS STUDY?**

The alternative is not to participate.

#### **WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO IN THIS STUDY?**

Your participation in this study will last up to 90 minutes and includes one visit. The procedures you will be asked to perform are described below.

This visit will last about 60 to 90 minutes. During this visit I will ask questions from an interview protocol/questionnaire. In order to get exact information from you, and increase the strength of the study, you will be audio taped in the 60 to 90 minute interview session.

Your name will be pre-coded to the recording tape that will be used to record the interview session. The transcriptions (writing down from the tape what you said) will also be coded in order to further protect your confidentiality. Written reports may entail the use of quoted material. At the conclusion of this study, the information gathered and audiotapes, identifiable only by subject number will be stored in a locked file that only I will be able to access.

**WILL VIDEO OR AUDIO RECORDINGS BE MADE OF ME DURING THE STUDY?**

***Required recordings:***

The researchers will make an audio recording during the study so that I will be able to get exact information from you and to increase the strength of the study. If you do not give permission for the audio recording to be obtained, you cannot participate in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_ I give my permission for audio recordings to be made of me during my participation in this research study.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not give my permission for audio recordings to be made of me during my participation in this research study.

**ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO ME?**

The things that you will be doing have no more risk than you would come across in everyday life.

**ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO ME?**

There is no direct benefit to you by being in this study. What the researchers find out from this study may help to enlighten educators learn more about the plight of the African American male superintendents in diverse settings. African American male educators who wish to become superintendents can use this research to gain insight from existing African American male superintendents, as well as, aspiring and incumbent African American male superintendents can also learn from this study by reflecting upon their own experiences.

**WILL THERE BE ANY COSTS TO ME?**

Aside from your time, there are no costs for taking part in the study.

**WILL I BE PAID TO BE IN THIS STUDY?**

You will not be paid for being in this study.

**WILL INFORMATION FROM THIS STUDY BE KEPT PRIVATE?**

The records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you to this study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be stored securely and only Aneil Chrisfor Smothers will have access to the records.

Information about you will be stored in locked file cabinet. This consent form will be filed securely in an official area.

Information about you will be kept confidential to the extent permitted or required by law. People who have access to your information include the Principal Investigator and research study personnel. Representatives of regulatory agencies such as the Office of Human Research

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Presenter

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX D

### States with African American Superintendents

<b>State</b>	<b>Number</b>
Alabama	19
*Alaska	0
Arizona	1
Arkansas	20
California	16
*Colorado	0
Connecticut	5
Delaware	2
District of Columbia	1
Florida	2
Georgia	32
*Hawaii	0
*Idaho	0
Illinois	39
Indiana	7
*Iowa	0
Kansas	1
Kentucky	2
Louisiana	5
*Maine	0
Maryland	3
Massachusetts	3
Michigan	21
Minnesota	1
Mississippi	43
Missouri	8
*Montana	0
*Nebraska	0

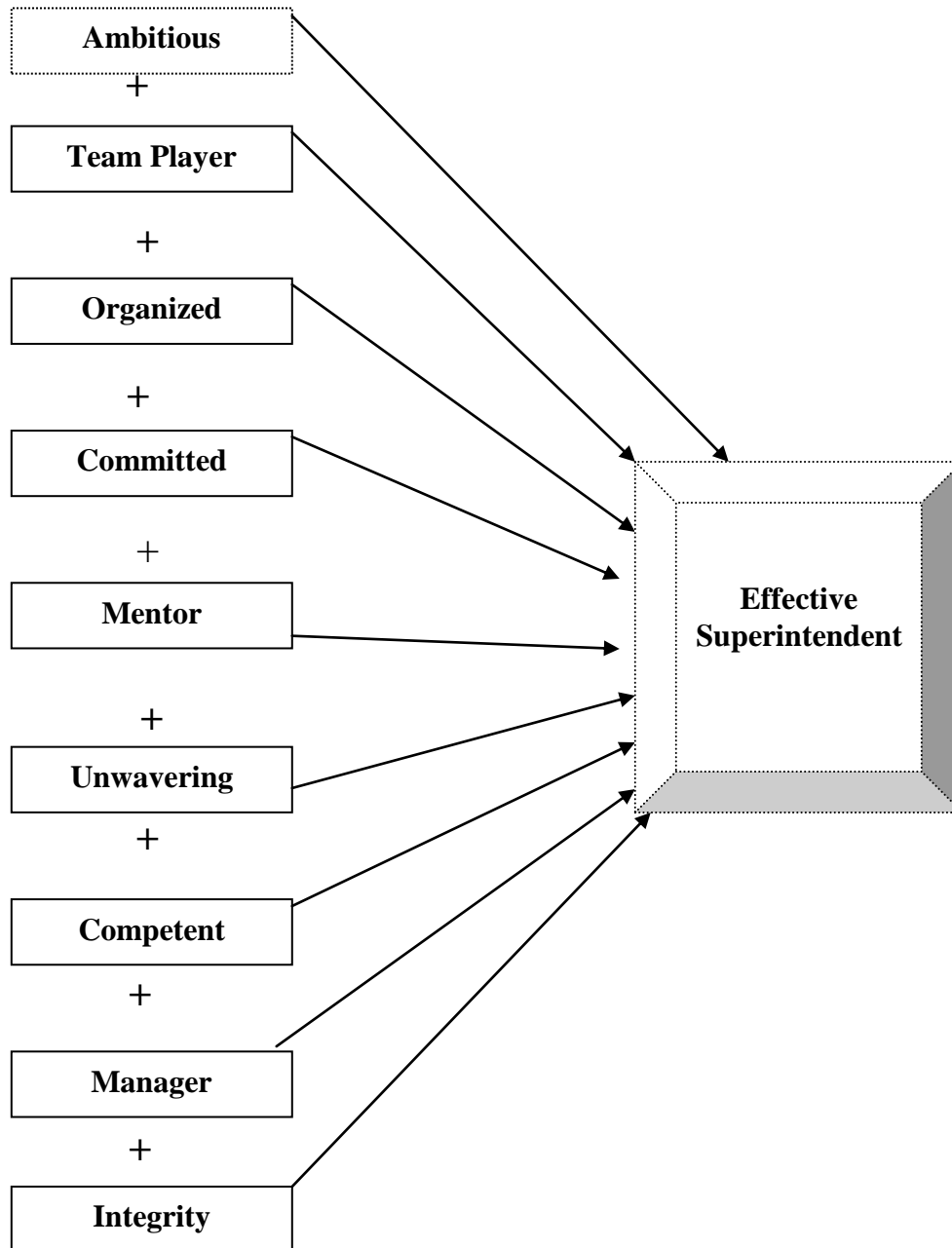
Nevada	1
*New Hampshire	0
New Jersey	18
*New Mexico	0
New York	20
North Carolina	7
*North Dakota	0
Ohio	7
Oklahoma	3
Oregon	1
Pennsylvania	8
*Rhode Island	0
South Carolina	20
*South Dakota	0
Tennessee	3
Texas	20
U.S. Virgin Islands	2
*Utah	0
*Vermont	0
Virginia	14
Washington	2
*West Virginia	0
Wisconsin	4
*Wyoming	0
*17 States do not have any African American Superintendents	
	361

Sources: National Alliance of Black School Educators:  
Directory of African American Superintendents,  
January 2011



## APPENDIX E

### Personal Characteristics of Effective Superintendents



## APPENDIX F

### Role of the Superintendent

